

RED

Aug. 15, 1983

Dear Harry:

Marx's Critique of the Erfurt Programme

Your comments to Olga on the Erfurt Program interested me very much because it all over again proved how, lacking a philosophy deeply rooted in the Hegelian-Marxian dialectic, all from Kautsky who betrayed, to Lenin and Luxemburg who were great revolutionaries, as was Connolly and very much Left of Kautsky even when he was an "orthodox Marxist" (which he was at the writing of Erfurt Program) -- could see no further than those ~~to whom~~ to whom revolution was no more than rhetoric. Don't forget that while the Erfurt Program led the GSD to believe themselves Marxists, they were the very ones who published it 15 years after the fact, only because Engels threatened to publish it elsewhere and even then it was surrounded by what could hardly be read other than a disclaimer. It said Marx's Critique was a "contribution" to their discussion of program, but that Erfurt was it, the Program and, moreover, their name was Social Democrat. Engels ~~did~~ did criticize the Program, warning that, because it was too abstract on politics, the political crises (sure to develop) would catch them by surprise, and Marxists must try to anticipate as much as possible. On the other hand, ~~critique~~ critique had nothing to say either on dialectics or revolution. That is what is called "diplomacy"--but he was then issuing the 4th ed. of Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State & the new Introduction put Morgan on very nearly the same plane of Historical Materialism as Marx, but 40 years late. Do remember that year, 1891; it is very much the period of origin of deviation from Marx's Marxism very nearly in full bloom, the term ~~of~~ of what would become Reformism.

The other aspect of your description of ~~the~~ Erfurt Program published by SLP in Britain has two important aspects. One is the very same lack of philosophy letting ~~see~~ see no further than ~~his~~ nose, to which I'll return in a minute, re SLP ~~when~~ when I landed in Britain with a copy of Marxism and Freedom. But I'd rather say something about popularization, in this case referring to Kautsky publishing the program in 4 pamphlets. On the one hand, it would appear as "good", but in fact it is showing you how deep is the concept of "backwardness of the masses." O.k., let's let them get away with that, but why should 4th book called The Commonwealth? Wasn't the Paris Commune form of gaining economic emancipation not only theory but the historic fact of greatest achievement by the proletariat? This "being forgiven" (I'm again referring to Engels) because of objective situation--Bismarck was in power and the Anti-Socialist laws dominant--never fails to land you where the bourgeoisie wants to, unless the neutral name is immediately followed by the real simplification, i.e., when it is a real concretisation of what one stands for, that is to say, control of production by the masses, or uprooting of old, etc. I doubt the word, genius, was the word used by Lenin on De Leon, but there is no doubt he loved De Leon's description of "aristocracy of labor" and attacks on union bureaucracy--AFL--so highly, and so disappointed in SP's break from what became CP, ~~from~~ from Russian Revolution, that he overestimated De Leon. When I ~~dug~~ dug deep into American history to see where the masses were instead of any party, I was shocked to read De Leon on that very period of American history outside of the trade union ~~that~~ that very nearly approved any rhetoric (including very nearly one that was racist in the Populist movement) that sounded militant. I found I couldn't use a single quotation

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including the rejection of trade unions in toto.

It is here where the SLP in London comes in. I do not remember his name, but he came up to me, praising highly my description of state-capitalism, but both rejecting philosophy--Alienation, I think it was then but it may have been Humanism--and praising all over again, this time to the skies, De Leon and quoting Lenin. I referred to the fact that that is exactly what doomed the Left of the Lefts, that instead of taking revolution from Lenin--and dialectics wouldn't have hurt either--they just took a phrase in one context and used it in one where it had no application, as was clear enough from Lenin's attack on the German ~~workers~~ and that magnificent pamphlet Leftism in Communism: An Infantile Disease. That, I believe, ended the talk. History just didn't seem to have move anywhere for them, and yet these people never tire of repeating "class struggle, class struggle" without once seeing what Reason issues from that class struggle--that remains for them in the hands of theoreticians lacking both Subject and Dialectics.

Paul Levi

The hands of

I don't seem to know anything about Reinstein; when was it that you were in Leningrad--I did so much crying when Lenin died, but then I was only 13 years, and, of course, being only a Pioneer I no doubt knew none of the leaders, especially since I was (in mind) still living in Russia, and had no use for any Americans, Do you by any chance have that interview with Lenin he wrote about for the Clyde Workers paper?

I don't seem to be able to get away from the imperativeness of philosophy, especially now when, for our Convention, in our Perspectives as well as in ROSA LUXEMBURG, WOMEN'S LIBERATION AND MARX'S PHILOSOPHY OF REVOLUTION, that we have issued this challenge to post-Marx Marxists. (I sure would like to get your comments on it. Isn't it possible for you to get a review of it published in Scotland? In all these talks you are ~~giving~~ still too many, I think, though I'm happy to hear your health has improved, can't you get others to review it? The Harvester Press is doing exactly nothing and so they are selling few whereas here the sales are ~~good~~ and of course my 3-mos. tour helped. What can be done in England? The group in London is way too young to have inroads either into labor or academia or the press.)

In any case, what I was referring to when I first began that paragraph, was your report of Reinstein's description of that Social-Democrat running into the Smolny Institute to report that Social Democrats are being shot, and those who said, "By God, I will need to go and see that." Clearly, ~~workers~~ workers who were revolutionaries, ~~not~~ not the least disturbed that some Mensheviks were being shot, and what I was thinking was: By God, if only they were as revolutionary in thought, in knowing how inseparable is actual revolution from philosophy of revolution, as ~~they~~ they were in act, we wouldn't have had so many unfinished revolutions!

The workers

It's great to hear that now that you are in good health you are looking forward to coming to the US in Spring. We certainly would love to see and talk with you. And, of course, Kay will be most welcome. Do please give her my warmest regards, and tell her I've never forgotten the stay with her.

Yours,

31 Babeg Street,
Glasgow, G51

AUG 8 1983

Dear Olga,

2nd August, 1983

This just a brief letter prompted by the communication "in lieu of R.E.B. minutes of 24th July." I was interested in the reference, by Rays, to the Erfurt Programme. I have reason to remember it. What I think strange about is the fact that the Socialist Labour Party, of which Connolly was one of the founders, was the only section of the movement that published here in Britain. The S.L.P. was the only Party that wanted power to be seized by the workers. They were building workshop shop groups and called for locking the boss out ~~out~~. Kautsky put it out in four pamphlets. They were named, "The Bourgeoisie," "The Proletariat," "The Class Struggle," "The Commonwealth." It was accepted by those who called themselves "Marxists." As you know, the S.L.P. followed Daniel De Leon.

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Connolly
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one*

Other form is popularization. And why "Commonwealth"?

I recall Boris Reinstein, an American, who was in Russia at time of the Revolution, writing in the Clyde Workers paper, the "Worker" an interview with Lenin. Lenin was reported in the interview as saying that De Leon must have a "genius".

Don't Q; he did have great respect "envisaged"

I met Reinstein, in Leningrad, some years later. I liked him better than any other person I met in Russia. It was in the Smolny Institute. He described a meeting held there. It was a marvellous description. He spoke about a Social-Democrat entering the room, saying "They are shooting our comrades at the Peter and Paul Fortress." Some said, "By God, I will need to go and see that." He took us to where the Duma met and described the closing of the Constituent Assembly.

*So now
I can
include*

He took us to the Church of St Isaac where there ^{was} a League of Athletes. It seemed an amateurish affair. Any one of us could improve on it. It didn't matter.

My health is now all right. I am going to Gloucester on Thursday to speak at a camp organised by the Young Socialists. I am pleased at the opportunity. I spoke to a meeting of unemployed in Birmingham last week. I ~~also~~ also spoke to a meeting of unemployed out-side Glasgow.

I ~~am~~ am looking forward to the visit to America in the Spring. Kay told me she is also going. My only trouble now is that I use a stick.

I wish you the best of health. That also to all on "News and Letters."

Harry. *We can forget the Erfurt Programme*

Harry