

Epitaph for a Scoundrel

Pages from the Record of John Pepper

By Ladislaus Rudas, President of the International Lenin School of Moscow

NOTE: In our Platform, published in the last issue of The Militant, we referred to the malodorous records of the present leaders of the Party who are expelling proletarian Communists wholesale. Many comrades have been astounded at the statements we made and wonder if it can be really true that such people control the Party.

Can it be possible, they ask, that people branded by their own past as Social Patriots, jailors of Communists, witnesses for the Government against Communists, craven-hearted cowards, Renegade "Anti-Red" crusaders, former enemies of the Russian Revolution, former agents of Hillquit and Berger in the fight against the Communists, etc., are parading as the "leaders" of Communism and expelling and defaming revolutionaries with honorable records behind them?

Yes, all the statements are true. Nobody dares to challenge a single one of them; for they can all be proven by documentary evidence.

John Pepper, (now in Moscow) whose record is set forth below, is one of the main leaders and is the Moscow wire-puller of the present Party regime. He is one of those scoundrels (there are many of them) who have taken the places in the Communist International of its founders—the Trotskys, the Radeks, the Rakowskys—and whose principal occupation is the fight against "Trotskyism," the term which is being used nowadays to define Leninism.

Pepper is the author of many of the slanderous denunciations of the expelled Communists and one of those who incited to violence against us. He was selected by the C.E.C. at the last Plenum to deliver the report against us and to demand our expulsion as "counter-revolutionaries," "renegades," etc. The document printed below shows that he is well qualified, by experience for this kind of a job.

We quote here a number of extracts from a book written by Ladislaus Rudas, one of the leaders of the Hungarian Revolution, who knows Pepper well. The book, entitled "Adventurers and Liquidationism" ("Abenteuer und Liquidationismus") was published in Vienna in 1922 for party circulation by the Voros Ujsag Verlag. Ladislaus Rudas is now the head of the International Lenin School at Moscow.

Pepper before the War

TO conduct this sham battle against a sham danger Pepper sought out in the sweat of his brow three passages out of a hundred articles. He tore these passages out of their context where, alone, they might be condemned. He tore these passages out of little notices where they were never intended as "slogans" but as agitation, and took the field against them with all the commonplaces of his Marxism. His Marxism however consists of patterns which he applies everywhere, whether they fit or not. He gave long discourses on Communism standing for the expropriation of the means of production, for large factories, etc., as though these were not ruins already well known to us when Pepper was still editor-in-chief of the petty-bourgeois boulevard sheet Friss Ujsag, while I had for some time been editor of the central organ of the social democracy in Budapest (1905). It is a piece of knavery when such as he would teach me about anarchism and syndicalism, where it was I who left the social democracy for its corruption when Pepper—to make a career—joined it! (page 191-2).

Pepper During the War

Without investigation Bela Kun ordered the expulsion from the Party of this comrade (in charge of the Party's illegal work—Ed.) who had been active in the working class movement for twenty years, who suffered a heavy prison sentence for many months during the war for the anti-militarist propaganda conducted while an officer, who led peasants' revolts during the Karolyi revolution and during the entire period of the dictatorship fought courageously and honestly with the Communists despite the fact that he was a social democrat. He ordered this punishment—the severest that a Communist can suffer—carried out by the same Pepper who, as Royal and Imperial war correspondent drank toasts to Austrian Generals while this comrade risked his life in anti-militarist agitation! (Page 116).

Pepper the Social Democrat

On February 20, 1919, great masses moved demonstratively before the building of the social democratic organ Nepszava. Clashes took place with the police in which a number of them were killed. The day after the demonstration the Communist leaders were arrested and brutally beaten in prison.

To characterize the conceptions of the social democracy another article by John Pepper, which appeared in Nepszava of February 21, 1919, should

be indicated here. Pepper, the most ambitious and conscienceless demagogue ever to be found in the social democracy; whose "Marxism" always consisted in covering with a theory the basest instincts of the dominant men in power in the Party to which he belonged; who in his writings always found a formula precisely for the commonest and most vulgar arguments—this Pepper strutted about as the leader of the soldiers' councils in the first days of the bourgeois revolution. . . . Even as the workers' councils were nothing but a pseudo-institution named by the party and trade union bureaucracy to hinder the creation of a real revolutionary institution of the proletariat, a pseudo-institution with no power at its command and with no will to exert influence,—just so was the soldiers' council seized by the social democratic party and served only to divert the proletarian revolution. The instrument of the social democracy was John Pepper, whom the soldiers' council served to satisfy his personal lust for power. He worked with full steam to become the war minister of the bourgeois republic. To show that he would maintain in this post, not to the detriment, but to the benefit of the bourgeoisie, he stormed against the Communists whom he was the first to designate as "left counter-revolutionaries". His expressions best characterize therefore the counter-revolutionary nature of the social democracy, since he was always merely the empty-headed mouthpiece of the prevailing demagoguery. (Page 29-30).

Pepper and the Bolsheviks

While participating, at the beginning of December 1918, in a meeting of the Ministry for Military Affairs at which martial law against the Communists was considered, he (Pepper) declared:

"I consider the whole Bolshevik movement, whose leaders I know very well, to be harmless. It is led by a few immature persons who have returned from Russia." (Voros Ujsag, December 11, 1918).

But when this movement led by "immature persons" began to bear ripe fruit, Pepper coined the phrase "left-counter-revolutionaries" and was ready to use the most shameless methods against them. He ordered out machine guns and armored cars against the soldiers who demanded in a demonstration the dismissal of the at that time openly counter-revolutionary Minister of War Festetics (Voros Ujsag, January 11, 1919); he ordered the arrest of comrades Tibor and Ladislaus Szamuely (Voros Ujsag, January 15, 1919); in numerous speeches he summoned the soldiers to pogroms against the Communists. At the same time, naturally, he sailed in the filthiest nationalist waters when he enjoined the soldiers: "Social democrat and Magyar mean the same thing." (Voros Ujsag, March 6, 1919. This remark was made by Pepper to incite the soldiers to the new imperialist war against the Czechs in the interests of the Hungarian bourgeoisie!) He had translated this passage directly from the Communist Manifesto into Hungarian (Page 31).

Pepper Imprisons Bela Kun

On January 2, 1919, the Communist soldiers in one of the barracks demanded the resignation of the then reactionary War Minister. Pepper thereupon ordered the arrest of Bela Kun. As Est of January 2, 1919, wrote as follows on the matter:

John Pepper, government commissar of the soldiers' council expressed himself to us about the demonstration of the Communist soldiers:

"The entire Communist soldiers' demonstration only shows that the Communists cannot really influence the soldiers, that the soldier masses as a whole are supporters of the social democratic party and are soldiers of the People's republic. Contrary to the artificial blatherskiting, the truth is that it is just the soldier masses who were the ones that arrested Bela Kun and his colleagues, and refused to give them the floor." (Page 31).

Pepper Turns Commissar!

Yesterday still "democrats" they (the social democrats) today became supporters of the proletarian dictatorship; yesterday still ministers of the bourgeois government, they today became without any transition "People's Commissars" of the Soviet government. On March 19, Siegmund Kunfi still made a long speech at election meetings "where I," he writes, "took a position everywhere against the dictatorship and for democratic socialism." John Pepper, however, still said the same thing, as Kunfi on March 19, 1919. And when a Com-

munist proposed at an election meeting to set free the imprisoned Communists, Pepper answered him as follows:

"I speak in the name of the Hungarian working class movement (He always talked tall—L. R.); in the name of the social democratic party, and these will use mass terror against everyone who seeks to terrorize in any way the representatives of the Hungarian working class (namely: himself, John Pepper—L. R.)" Pester Lloyd, March 20, 1919.

Two days later they became—Pepper even with "stormy enthusiasm" — "people's commissars"! (Page 41-2).

The Communists Force Pepper's Resignation

The Communists were naturally embittered that the fate of the Party should be decided over their heads. . . . Mainly, however, did the Communists feel bitter over the naming of John Pepper as People's Commissar for Military Affairs, the same Pepper who, of all the social democrats, had acted most shamelessly and despicably towards the Communists, who coined the phrase of "left counter-revolutionaries" against them, who was prepared to assume the role of Noske and to order out machine guns against the revolutionary soldiers. The Communists did not allow even the threats of Kun to restrain them and moved en masse before the building of the People's Commissariat of Military Affairs and forced Pepper to resign. On April 4, Nepszava published the report of his resignation. (Page 58).

Pepper Wants a Second Party

There were many who blamed Bela Kun entirely for the failure of the revolution.

Thus, for example, John Pepper openly proclaimed that Bela Kun was a traitor, that he must be eliminated from the movement, that a new party must be founded. We all wanted a new party, but Pepper immediately became a liquidator. He wanted to found a party on new principles; and that the new Communist Party should be a peasants' party. An open, legal peasants' party—since Hungary was an agrarian country! In this spirit he drew up a memorandum and sent it—to Michael Karolyi, the former president of the People's Republic, since he had chosen this gentleman as the leader of his "new" party! At any rate, it was rejected by Karolyi, for Karolyi, personally one of the most honest bourgeois politicians, would not for a single moment have anything to do with a Pepper. Then, said he, the proletariat needs no party, since every proletarian in Hungary is a Communist, it is only necessary to put arms in his hands and the revolution is here again! At one and the same time he was—a right and a left liquidator! (Page 96-7).

Chicago Comrades Protest

"To the District Convention
Workers Communist Party
District No. 8.

Dear Comrades:

We request that you read the following to the District Convention:

1. We have witnessed recently a series of expulsions of leading and proletarian comrades, most of whom participated in the formation of our Party, and actively engaged in Party work. These expulsions took place because of their political views or protesting the expulsion policy.

2. The expulsion policy carries all the dangers of destroying our Party and is the path to split our Party.

3. In our opinion the expulsions are only an effort on the part of the CEC majority to conceal their right wing errors. It is an effort to hide the real danger facing our Party, the right danger exemplified by the Lovestone group. This has only the effect of perpetuating the right wing danger in our Party and the continuance of their bureaucratic control.

4. The expulsion took place on the basis that these comrades adopted the position of "Trotskyism" or protested the expulsion of Comrades Cannon, Abern and Shachtman. It must be stated that the discussion on Trotskyism was inadequate, and it is necessary to hold a free and open discussion of the Russian Opposition with the documents present.

5. We wish to emphatically protest against the expulsions and demand the reinstatement of these comrades to their former duties and Party posts.

Faternally yours,

Jack Cohen, Dan Pollin, Fannie Mirak, Rebecca Sacherow, H. P. Glaser, A. Bornstein, Elsie Meyers, H. Kretick, Os-heroff, Leon Mussel, Lillian Bergeron.