

An Open Letter

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less a relic of the past, all lovers of international democracy rejoiced in the fact, principally, because they hoped that this would mean not America's subjugation to outworn European diplomacy, but Europe's becoming inoculated with the young virus of all that which is real in the democracy of America.

"Now I am asking myself and I would ask you: Shall America, now that she has the greatest opportunity ever given a country to bring new forms and new, clean views into world diplomacy and international relations, shall she submit to stale shop-keeper considerations of European diplomacy and not utilize the tremendous reservoir of democracy in Russia in order to strengthen America's historical mission of bringing democracy into European policies?"

America, it seems, has not availed herself of that opportunity. Instead of that she has been induced, it seems, not only to serve reactionism, but, unwittingly, I hope, to deceive the liberal thought in the world, or at least in America, into support of that reactionism, by giving it her indorsement—and the result of all this has been that we are now witnessing the paradox of the defenders of "law and order" and of a "new freedom" engaged in an interventionist adventure against the only force in Russia which is capable of bringing about order and the new freedom.

It is not less paradoxical that I, representing the ideas and aims of those revolutionaries whom your press is branding as the craziest fanatics, impracticals and visionaries, should talk to you urging practical and sane policies, orderliness, and political honesty, as against chaos and disorder.

For more than six months I have been among you as a voice crying in the wilderness trying to hope against hope that rational thinking and common sense might mean something to your society, even the greatest class issues are involved. I have been trying to do a work of persuasion, employing all possible tactfulness and consideration of the peculiarities of the situation and of your psychology. I have been doing it in the face of sneers and suspicion among my perhaps less polite, but surely more experienced proletarian comrades, who over and over again told me that it is entirely out of the question to try to make a bourgeois understand the justice and the necessity of anything which means the lessening of the class supremacy of capitalism, and who for that reason regarded as useless on the part of the workers everything except the most merciless struggle in every possible manner against those who rule the world. You are doing, I fear, all you can to encourage such views.

As the representative of the Finnish Workers' Republic I tried patiently, and using language as considerate as possible, to make your government understand at least something about our situation over there. I offered you co-operation in return for concrete helpfulness. I proved to you that if the democratic professions of America count for anything in America, in the struggle of the workers in Finland, America has a cause worthy of unconditional support. We had there on our side not only the majority of the people, but we had that majority expressed in our favor by legal parliamentary proceedings, unequivocally proving that the cause of the Finnish workers is the cause of democracy. We had a case where the Finnish workers not only were opposed to German autocracy, but were fighting it bitterly, directly aiding the cause of the Allies, in so far as that cause involves the crushing of German militarism. We have on the side of our enemies in Finland representatives not only of the minority of the people, but of a parliamentary minority, openly hostile to even such democratic principles as are a matter of fact in America today

—as equal suffrage, social legislation and theoretical equality of opportunity. In Finland there was not even a question of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" such as in Russia. The Finnish workers expressly wanted to call together a Constitutional Assembly on the basis of equal suffrage for all inhabitants of Finland. The other side not only temporarily allied itself with the Germans, but was for three years criminally plotting with the German imperialists and in every way was an accessory to the most abominable crimes of Prussianism. Yet that other side was the one which received all the encouragement and still is receiving it from you. I was never given a fair and a serious hearing.

Some time ago I made a formal proposition to the United States Government about co-operation between the Finnish Red Guard and the Allies on the Murman Coast, and I never received even an acknowledgment of that proposition. And, please, do not tell me that the reason for this slighting attitude was that it is not proper to confer with the representatives of unrecognized factions. Three years ago the representatives of the state department had all kinds of negotiations with all kinds of Mexican factions not including Villa. You have had no scruples in officially dealing with and recognizing Professor Masaryk, representing the Bohemian National Council, although his status certainly is not as official even as mine, he being the self-appointed president of some national council, which some time may become the Government of Bohemia or may not, but nevertheless at this time represents only an aspiration. I represent a de jure government, supported by the parliamentary majority of the people, a government which, although it is driven out from its home land today, has not renounced its claims and never will renounce them, and with which you will have to deal by and by, as it surely will once more come into its right.

But there was really a difference between Professor Masaryk and me. I made it a point, and still make a point of all our co-operation with the Allies, that they should recognize the Russian Soviets. Professor Masaryk offered to crush the Russian Soviet government with his Czechs and thus put an end to Socialist rule in Russia. There lies, perhaps, the reason for the difference in the treatment we have received.

Again I ask you, how in the name of common sense can you expect any one of us who has gone through the experiences which I have had in these six months of modest attempts at proletarian diplomacy not to see, that every political move is made on the basis of economic interests and that if we, the Finnish Socialists or the Russian Socialists, were the very arch-angels of orderliness, constructive political ability and common sanity we would be still branded as brigands as long as we did not renounce our social aims which are the natural next step in the social progress of the world?

However, I did not write this letter in order to criticize only. I have lived in America long enough to become an admirer of your tremendous resourcefulness, your ability of initiative, your youthful social vigor, unhampered by centuries of feudal tradition, and I have dreamed, as many others have dreamed, that America, because of these her assets, will be able to bring common sense into a world, which is now paying a horrible price for the inability of its ruling classes to admit that the twentieth century is a century of labor democracy. And heaven knows that I, and almost everyone of us who believe in the Russian Revolution and in the ultimate victory of Socialism, from the very outset of the world war have been partisans of the Allies. Not that we for a moment renounced our convictions that class interests are the paramount issue in every capitalist state. Yet we are no such fools as not to see that modern industrial evolution, which inevitably leads to Socialism, is less hampered—at least normally has been—by the so-called

western democracy than by the rigid system of Prussianism. Also the sentimental traditions of liberal and revolutionary opportunity in France, in Belgium, in England, in Italy and in America as well as our whole-hearted disgust with those peculiarities of modern capitalistic materialism which more pronouncedly than anywhere else are expressed in the Prussian system, have kept us distinctly in favor of an Allied victory—if this war is to end in the victory of one or the other side. I only wish that the Allies, including the United States, would not have done everything in their power to make it as difficult as possible for any real radical to stick to those hopes!

But if the world war is to end in an alliance of imperialistic Germany and the Allies against radicalism and socialism all over the world—if the Russian venture is pressed to its logical conclusion—then there of course is no choice for an honest radical between the present belligerent groups. I do not know that I can hope that this may be avoided. Writing to you about these things, although I myself am pretty much losing any hope of response, we still leave an opportunity to you to prove in some concrete fashion that a capitalist state, confronted with the problem of a rising working class, has other channels to offer for the evolution than that of a brutal class war.

Your experience in Russia up till today has, perhaps even to your satisfaction, proven to you that the best outcome of the situation would be to put an end to the intervention, as long as it is not too late. I met a government official not long ago who told me frankly that the best hope he entertained in regard to the Russian situation was that the Americans might be able to end the adventure at least as easily as you ended your Mexican intervention. I am afraid that that optimistic hope is not likely to become a fact—if something is not done at once. You were able to get away from Mexico "with honor." You were the masters of the situation there, as far as your own actions were concerned. In Russia, especially in Vladivostok, you are not—your financial influence with the Allies notwithstanding. You may expect to do anything you want, but you will have to do that, into which the Japanese and Russian reactionaries will draw you—and they know more about how to complicate the Russian situation than your representatives know how to avoid a complication.

If there is any hope of an honest ending of the present situation, it can be achieved only on the basis of actual negotiations with the Soviet Government. Today, I, as the representative of the Finnish Workers' Republic, am officially sending your government a proposition of mediation between America and the Russian Soviets. Not that I for one moment believe that such a proposition will be entertained, nor even acknowledged, but for the sake of historic record I will put myself and our cause down as having done everything imaginable and consistent with our principles to avoid the calamity of a general war between the Russian people and the Allies.

It may seem preposterous to some of your officials, and perhaps to you as well, that we, the unrecognized and uncouth representatives of the aspirations of the masses in the East, shall even expect a consideration of our propositions. But the history of what we are doing today, and of what you are doing or not doing, will be recorded a few decades from now by historians of a period when the idea we represent today will have become the basis of the structure of the world, and it will be our society of tomorrow, which will pass judgment on your class of today.

(Lenin's speech was greeted with tremendous enthusiasm, and a resolution was passed embodying his recommendations.)