

Olgin's 'Why Communism?'—A Pamphlet for the Millions

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For more than two years, the Communist Party has been issuing literature on a mass scale. Previous to that time, the Party fully recognized the need of mass propaganda, but did not succeed in finding the proper form for reaching masses of workers with the agitation and propaganda of the Party. Pamphlets were issued, but the number of readers could be counted only by the tens of thousands.

Today, the situation is quite different. The number of readers of Party literature reaches hundreds of thousands. This is to be noted not only in the Communist press (newspapers), but particularly in the readers of Communist pamphlets and books. These pamphlets deal with every variety of subject—problems of the daily struggle, for workers, farmers, youth, intellectuals, women, Negroes, etc. They deal with special issues before the workers: unemployment and social insurance, trade unionism, labor party, religion, war, and fascism, etc. In the aggregate millions of pamphlets have been issued, sold and read, winning hundreds of thousands of recruits, supporters, sympathizers for the Communist movement.

"Why Communism?"

In the forefront of all publications of the Communist Party is the pamphlet by Comrade M. J. Olgin, entitled "Why Communism?" This pamphlet, now in its fifth printing, not only filled a much wanted need, but at the same time has met with such favor that with each printing it was necessary to bring it up to date.

The fifth printing—a second revised edition—fulfills in splendid manner what is required of writings for the masses: simplicity in style and form, clarity and conciseness. "Why Communism?" is designed for the so-called average worker, with his political backwardness, none too great understanding of political terms, and for the worker whose vocabulary is none too extensive.

"Why Communism?" begins with the things the worker knows from experience and leads him from the known to the for him, unknown. It deals with the every-day strug-

gles with which every worker now after two years of the "New Deal" is thoroughly acquainted. It explains not only the "New Deal," but the whole basis of exploitation, the manner in which it takes place, the solution and the manner of achievement.

Socialist Party Aims Analyzed

"Why Communism?" however, is not so primitive that it can be appreciated only by backward workers. On the contrary, its very simplicity is such as to appeal to all workers and to intellectuals as well. Comrade Olgin took into consideration that many workers will confuse the Communist Party with the Socialist Party. Both stand for "socialism"—at least the Socialist Party still pretends to. Comrade Olgin, with a sharp knife dissects the reformist position of the Socialist Party, not only in the United States but also in Europe, and clearly shows that its position is not for the proletarian revolution, but at most to gain small concessions for the workers under capitalism. He shows how, whenever they have been in office—as in Germany, in England, etc.—the Socialist statesmen have not used their position to fight for socialism, but have used state power to smash the struggles of the revolutionary workers. "Why Communism?", therefore, is an excellent pamphlet to put into the hands also of Socialist workers.

Union Bureaucrats Exposed

Comrade Olgin devotes quite a section of his pamphlet to an exposition of the reformist trade union leaders. He shows by means of facts that are widely known today that the reactionary bureaucrats work hand in glove with the capitalists who grant crumbs to the workers only when they put up a fight; but who, in league with these leaders, suppress the struggles of the workers with the aid of the State machinery—police, courts, troops.

The handling of the state—government power—its function in society, the necessity of destroying this power of the capitalist class and of establishing working-class power in the form of a Soviet government, are dealt with in the light

of experience, not only under capitalism but in the Soviet Union, in a form that any worker will understand.

What fascism is and why it is introduced by the capitalists at a time of crisis—and particularly now in the general crisis of the capitalist system—how it must and can be fought, are brought forward in simple form. How to fight it—how can the worker obtain freedom? Only by the united front of all workers, poor farmers, intellectuals, etc., fighting for their daily needs, for their rights. The united front, regardless of political, religious or other affiliation, representing the fighting unity of all toilers—this is the only safeguard in the struggle against fascism and war.

Communist Motives

The Communists are accused of having sinister motives in the class struggle. Our motives and aims are open and above-board: We want and are fighting for the unity of all workers in the interests of all toilers, with the aim of destroying the exploiters and building up the new system—Socialism. That is why the Communists are the best fighters. That is why the workers want and need Communist leadership. That is why the capitalists and their government misrepresent the Communists, the Soviet Union and the revolutionary movement. Their purpose is to suppress the Communist Party as a first step in crushing the entire labor movement.

The workers do not want to jump in the dark. What will Socialism mean? What will it bring them? Is it just another system, but signifying the same misery and starvation that is their lot today? Comrade Olgin shows on the basis of the building of Socialism in the Soviet Union what the proletarian revolution has meant to the Russian workers and peasants—not only materially in relation to their situation before the revolution, but also culturally. Yes, and particularly in the matter of democratic rights. This is so important in the United States where the workers are fed on illusions that we have "democracy" in this country—the freest, most democratic country

in the world." There is no democracy where the workers are not economically free and secure. No worker, no poor farmer, no intellectual can talk about freedom or democracy in the United States or any other capitalist country.

But what assurance has the worker under Socialism that shackles will not be laid upon him again? The assurance that he is no longer exploited and that the government—the State power—is not the government of an exploiting class but of the workers and farmers themselves, who alone have power in the Soviet government.

A particular section of the pamphlet, "Why Communism?" deals with the Negro question. The Socialists, trade union bureaucrats and renegades from Communism deny that there is such a thing as a Negro "question." For them it is merely a question of white and of colored workers. They deny that the Negroes, as a people, are exploited, degraded, oppressed and lynched.

They deny that the Negroes have the characteristics of a national minority, and thus they help the lynchers and oppressors in maintaining the cleft between the Negro people and the white workers. They help to maintain the whole system of Jim-Crowism, segregation and terror with which the white rulers intimidate and attempt to crush the struggles of the Negro people. Comrade Olgin explains the Negro question, the necessity of unity between whites and Negroes and the right of the Negro people to self-determination in the Black Belt in the South, which will give them the freedom they struggle for today, and which can be won only in closest alliance with the white workers.

A Few Weaknesses

There are a few minor and yet important weaknesses in the pamphlet—minor in the sense that the pamphlet might have been more complete and would answer a few questions a little more thoroughly. The drive against the Communists in the reformist unions is gaining momentum. Green, Woll, and Lewis want to expel the Communists. Comrade Olgin should have devoted more time to an explanation of Communist tactics in the unions,

so that non-Communist trade unionists, who might be poisoned with the venom that the reactionary trade union bureaucrats try to instill, would easily understand the trickery of the reformists and the methods of work of the Communists and the militant workers associated with them.

Then again, with the churches taking on a militant tone and program today to meet the rising indignation and radicalism of the masses; with tens of thousands of church people entering the united front with the Communists, Comrade Olgin should have dealt with the question of religion and the church in his pamphlet. This question meets us on every hand and should be dealt with in a pamphlet which has reached and is destined to reach many more hundreds of thousands of readers of every category.

Justified Popularity

The popularity of "Why Communism?" is well justified. It is one of our most easily understood pamphlets, written by one of our most popular pamphleteers. The first four editions reached a total of 316,000 and no doubt the copies were passed on to many other readers. This is in English. "Why Communism?" has been translated into a number of other languages, among them Italian, Jugoslav, Yiddish, Hungarian, Armenian. The present fifth printing—a second revised edition—has been much improved and strengthened.

At this time when every effort is being made to hamper our work and to outlaw the Communist Party; at a time when expulsions from the American Federation of Labor are being attempted by the reactionary bureaucrats with all effrontery—and just when unity is most needed, for which the Communists are fighting with all energy; when war is in the offing and armed invasion of the Soviet Union is being plotted, it is most important that the American workers be made acquainted by the millions with the program, policy and strategy of the Communist Party. "Why Communism?" is an excellent small handbook in this respect, and in its revised form, should reach the hands of more hundreds of thousands of workers.