
Why Mrs. Olson Voted for Foster

by Jay Lovestone

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In telling why she voted for the acquittal of William Z. Foster in the Michigan Communist Trial, Mrs. Minerva Olson did not get lost in a sea of words. Mrs. Olson, the only woman juror, is a died-in-the-wool American boasting of forefathers in the days of the Revolutionary War. Her statement in the New York Times of April 6 [1923] is very instructive to the workers. It is typical of the fast disappearing rarity — genuine American liberalism, Jeffersonian democracy at its purest.

Against Railroading Foster.

“The stage setting of the prosecution seemed over-employed with such a display of detectives and undercover men that it appeared more like trying to railroad Foster than like prosecuting him,” said Mrs. Olson. In her opinion that was the reason why half the jury voted for acquittal. This is an example of the old-time American fair play. During the war and in the early post-war days when the mass of workers were completely helpless under the iron heel of the dictatorship of the big capitalists, this American spirit [of] fair play was dead. Its reappearance in Michigan merely reflects the letting up in the capitalist rule of blood and iron brought about by the recent political and industrial pressure of the American workers and working farmers. We had the same Americans trying Communists in 1920 and sending them to jail. The Communists are just as revolutionary today as they were then, but the conditions have greatly changed. In 1920 showing fair play to the Communists was a crime as detestable as the horrible crimes only Communists could commit.

Mrs. Olson's Clear Understanding.

Mrs. Olson showed her clear understanding of the significance of the Foster trial when she said: "I could look away from the courtroom when the trial was on, and see conflicting forces contenting for the mastery of human rights. The trial was far bigger to me than merely determining whether Mr. Foster was guilty or not.... Other members of the jury saw the same things. It was really a big battle for human rights...."

This statement is especially significant to the working man. The jury in the Foster case was a typical farmers' jury. And the above sentiments and subsequent actions truly reflected the role of the farmers in the class struggle today. The center of gravity in the class war today is in the struggle between the capitalist class and working class. In this great struggle the farming masses are as yet undecided with whom to pitch in their lot. The spirit of indecision characterizing the attitude of our farming masses is clearly reflected in the "hung" jury — in the farmers' jury that refused to hang Foster, the militant leader of the workers.

The Right to Revolution Vindicated.

And Mrs. Olson, whom obviously no one could accuse of being an "ignorant foreigner," went even further. "Agitation may not be altogether pleasant, but we must remember that it is the agitators who have brought progress into the world. Do not think that I took the side I did because I am un-American or because of any foreign influences. My forefathers were here in the revolutionary days of 1776. My great-grandfather was an officer in the Revolutionary War. Perhaps for that reason I have some of the revolutionary spirit. I am for progress, not stagnation."

This view of the situation proves that Mrs. Olson is worthy of the place of a national figure achieved by her through the trial. It is a courageous and honest statement. Our fraudulent, sycophantic, professorial, and editorial press agents of the employing class have been talking themselves blue in the face as to the inherent "peaceable" characteristics of the American masses. American history gives the lie to the prating of these lickspittles. The great American masses have never refused to fight and fight to the bitter end when their rights were at stake. America was born out of revolution — an armed revolution

against the British ruling class. For a time during and after the Revolutionary War the working masses who were bled in the battles were a real political power. They were only later cheated of their political influence by such reactionary "Fathers" as Madison and Hamilton.

What is more, there has not been a single constitutional amendment that was put over without recourse to force. The Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Sixteenth Amendments are the only amendments involving a fundamental change in property relationships; and the Civil War was fought to compel the Southern ruling, slave-holding, class to obey the new law and order as laid down for them by these amendments.

Let the Workers Greet Mrs. Olson.

The working men and working women of America owe a debt of gratitude to Mrs. Minerva Olson. Even today, with the capitalist reaction somewhat checked by working class resistance, it requires great courage and honesty of purpose to express this truth with such fearlessness and lucidity as Mrs. Olson has expressed. Let every reader of *The Worker*, let every friend of every reader of *The Worker* in every labor organization write to Mrs. Olson in appreciation of her integrity and in honor of the well deserved national fame she has now won.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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