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## **“Parliamentarism” and “Political Action”: A Letter to the Editor of the *New York Call*, March 17, 1919.**

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Editor of *The Call*:

Comrade King's letter in your issue of the 4th instant is the best argument put forward to date against the Left Wing manifesto and program. Consequently, it deserves analysis.

Comrade King's conception of political action is false. To him “parliamentarism” and “political action” are one and the same. By socialist political action is meant any action on the part of the proletariat which aims at the undermining and overthrow of the political power of the capitalist class. In this sense a strike of the United Mine Workers and Railway Brotherhood for the repeal of the Espionage Law is a highly political act — however, many non-citizens and non-voters may participate in such political act. Furthermore, “the exposure of diplomatic trickery, cheating and knavery is one of the most important functions of socialist political agitation.” The employment of political offices won by the working class for the purpose of protesting “against the absolutism which hides behind the parliamentary forms” is also a highly political act.

By parliamentarism is meant the employment of the political offices won by the representatives of the Socialist Party for the purpose of attempting immediately to palliate and alleviate the misery resulting to the working class from capitalist production. The new Milwaukee methods of filing payrolls, making the water cheap, introduction of a bill for the “solution” of the “food problem” in New York state, and the acceptance of a berth in a bourgeois cabinet, are distinct examples of parliamentarism. These do not aid by an iota the undermining and overthrow of capitalist political power by the working class. They are, therefore,

not socialist political action, and this fundamental concept Comrade King fails to grasp.

Comrade King also has an erroneous conception of the nature and function of the capitalist state. To him the capitalist state, the state existing in capitalist society, is an organ to be employed by the working class for “gradually” carrying out “constructive” social reforms. This view the Left Wing rejects.

Labriola holds that “the state is a real organization of defense to guarantee and perpetuate a mode of association, the foundation of which is a form of economic production.” The state in capitalist society is an organization for perpetuating the capitalist mode of production.

Engels contends that “in reality the state is nothing else but a machine for the oppressing of one class by another, and that no less so in a democratic republic than under a monarchy.” The Left Wing insists that a capitalist organ of oppression cannot serve as a means of liberating the proletariat. Again, says Engels: “The modern state is only the organization that bourgeois society takes on in order to support the external conditions of the capitalist mode of production against the encroachments as well of the workers as of individual capitalist.” To secure socialism, bourgeois society and its supporting organization (the state) must be destroyed. In short, the Left Wing holds with Wilhelm Liebknecht that “Revolution will never be carried out by permission of the high magistrates. The socialist idea cannot be realized within the present state, but must overthrow the latter if it is itself to come to birth. No peace with the present state! And away with this worship of the universal and direct franchise.”

Reformism wants to usher in socialism “on the

basis of the present bourgeois social order." Because of this conception of socialism, Comrade King is muddled as to what constitutes socialist political control. The winning of legislative seats by the Socialist Party does not give the working class political control. In the Finnish Diet the socialists had a majority. And today the Finnish Junkers are drilling assassins of the Finnish proletariat in the labor halls.

Now we come to the first of King's crushing questions: "What will the Left Wing do when capitalistic society is confronted by an unemployment crisis?" We answer: "Suppose there are today 4,000,000 unemployed. The Left Wing would take advantage of this crisis of capitalism and spread revolutionary socialist propaganda among the unemployed. It would not stop here. It would propose and work for a countrywide strike for shorter hours so that fewer workers may be disemployed. If the Left Wing thought the crisis acute enough, it would agitate for the immediate seizure of all political power by the working class and the expropriation of the bourgeoisie."

Crushing question No. 2 deals with militarism. In its attack on militarism, the Left Wing would not be pacifist — humanitarian. Militarism is a phenomenon inherent in a class society. Only working class opposition to militarism is to be sought, and the anti-militarism campaign is to be waged solely on a class basis.

Crushing question No. 3 deals with "municipal control." Let us propose that our revolutionary Comrade Hillquit were elected Mayor of New York on the platform of cheap milk (8¢) and the whole litter of "practical" social reforms. Comrade Hillquit keeps his pledges. Hence by some machinery, 8-cent milk is decreed. We will grant the possibility for the sake of discussion. We will omit the sabotage of capitalism, the possibility of corrupt bureaucracy, and the graft, red tape, and other attendant evils of government ownership. We will assume that the workers are reveling in cheap milk!

Now the problem is this: Kautsky in his *High Cost of Living* says: "The general character of price development since 1907 is this: steady rise in prices of the necessities of life for the workers, of the agricultural raw material of industry, slow additions to the demand for industrial products, stagnation in the wages of the industrial working class. This is true especially

for America." Are we to suppose that, with a Hillquit administration of the city, these laws will not operate? That the cost of milk will remain stationary? His Honor, Mayor Hillquit decrees their suspension!

Let us suppose that Mayor Hillquit becomes more revolutionary and sets up model tenements and rents them out at the cost of maintenance, and, with cheap milk and cheap dwellings, the cost of living is reduced 20 percent. What would be the result? Would the "practical" reforms hold our city for the socialists until the state should be ours? Did King really believe this?

Let us hear the answer of the "reformist" Engels, to the "revolutionists" King and Hillquit: "We will assume that in a given industrial district it has become the rule for every worker to own his own little house. In this case, the working class lives in that district rent free. The cost of dwelling house does not enter into the value of their labor-power. Every narrowing of the cost of production of labor-power, i.e., every permanent reduction of the price of the necessities of life for the workers brings about a reduction of the value of labor-power at once, and is followed, consequently, by a corresponding fall in the wages of labor. And so the wages of labor will fall on account of the average saving in the cost of rent, that is to say, the worker will pay for the rent of his own house, not, as formerly, in money to the house owner, but in unpaid labor in the factory for which he works. In this manner the savings of the worker invested in his little house come to be a kind of capital, not as capital for him, but as capital for the capitalists who employ him.

"By the way, the above holds true in the case of all such so-called social reforms which aim at saving and cheapening the means of living for the workers. Either they become universal, and then are followed by a corresponding reduction of wages, or else they remain entirely sporadic experiments, and their very existence as separate exceptions shows that to carry them out on a large scale is inconsistent with the existing capitalistic system of production.

"Let us suppose that in some district it happens that, through a general introduction of cooperative consuming societies, the means of living for the workers are made 20 percent cheaper. Then the wages must finally fall there in the neighborhood of 20 percent; that is to say, in the same proportion in which the

means of living enter into the cost of living for the worker."

So much for socialist municipal control a la Hillquit. Now, let us take up socialist state control a la King. In the year 1919 the state of California runs "red." Let us give the Governorship to Job Harriman and confront him, as per King's dilemma, with an unemployment crisis. Comrade King becomes Director of Unemployment and introduces his galaxy of "practical solutions."

The situation he is to meet is the following: In the United States in 1919, there are 4,000,000 unemployed, and to bring the problem home, California's quota is 200,000. The solution is reforestation, colonization, public works, and the like. He secures the necessary revenue by taxation to employ the whole 200,000. Of course, that, even at "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work," say \$3 per day, would mean an expenditure of \$3,600,000 weekly.

Now, then, with such opportunities, what would Comrade King do when this attracted an influx of labor from other parts of the United States? Would Director King employ the influx, or employ deportation? Would he stop short of the whole unemployed 4,000,000? What would happen to California's over-taxed industries? Where would he float the bonds? Will the bankers finance this "social revolution?" Where will he put all the public works?

What brings King and his like face to face with such ridiculous situations? In the answer to this lies

the vital difference between the Right and Left Wings, between "moderate" and socialist.

The moderate contends that the industries can be socialized by means of the present bourgeois state (witness King's "socialist control" through being "able to command a majority in the House of Representatives in Washington," through his delightful city-state-national road).

Our conception of socialist political control is, to quote Marx, "a transition period, in which the state cannot be anything else but a dictatorship of the proletariat." We hold with the Communist Manifesto that "the proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of this state — i.e., of the proletariat organized as the ruling class." It is this state, Comrade King, and not the bourgeois state, through which Comrade Lenin is establishing "state accounting and control." And they annihilated the bourgeois state first.

No it is not by petitioning the President, when he "can't be found." It is not by attempting to solve the insolvable, capitalism's contradictions, but by "teaching, propagating, and agitating exclusively for the overthrow of capitalism and the necessity of instituting of the proletarian dictatorship" that socialism can be attained!

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