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EDITORIAL

CLASH OF BOURGEOIS THOUGHT.

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SINGULARLY symbolic of the at once alien and bourgeois essence of the Socialist party is a certain motion, now before that party for a referendum, together with the argument against the motion.

The motion proceeds from Ferdinand Ufert, a national committee member from the State of New Jersey. It consists of five whereases summing up the arbitrary action of President Roosevelt in the matter of the dishonorable discharge of the colored troops of the Twenty-fifth regiment; pointing out the fact that the innocent in this instance are made to suffer with the guilty; detailing the evil consequences of the discharge to the men in that it “would forever debar them from re-entry to service or to secure any manner of employment under the government”; and holding up to scorn the “great injustice thereby done to members of our class.” The motion culminates in a resolution denouncing the action of the President on the ground that the Socialist party is in accord with the International Organization that “justice be meted out to all regardless of color, creed or condition.”

Language like this would be in place in Germany. There, indeed, soldiers may be referred to by Socialists as “members of our class.” In Germany workingmen are taken, against their will, into the Army, and kept there for a term of at least three years, forced to do military service. In Germany the treatment bestowed upon soldiers, their housing, their future prospects—all this is just matter for Socialist solicitude. Not the bourgeois misty sense of “justice,” but the concrete material interests of the “members of our class” concerns the German Socialists and frequently constitute the theme of their just denunciation of the government’s treatment of soldiers. But here in America! Here where enlistment is voluntary, here where the soldier chooses his avocation, and that avocation—the avocation of manslaughter—to here refer to soldiers as “members of our class,” and to demand

“justice” for them in the name of Socialism, that is the limit of the grotesque. The act is explainable only by the theory that the Socialist who indulges in it has his mind so steeped in German practices that he is not even capable to discern the sense of such act in Germany, hence the nonsense of the same in America.

But not yet is the picture complete. No organization can absolutely guarantee the soundness of each member. There may be some exceptional member. The errors of such are not symbolic of the organization itself. In this instance, however, the national committee member of New Jersey does not stand as the exception that proves the rule, in the Socialist party. The national committee member from Alabama, La Rue, hastens to supplement his New Jersey compeer and thereby to perfect the picture. The Alabama national committee member objects to the motion of the New Jersey national committee member—upon what ground in particular? The burden of his argument is that the New Jersey proposition “injects the Negro question into the Socialist party”; and he says: “I think there is no question that the President’s action has the entire approval of the Southern Socialists, and it must be admitted in all fairness that we know the Negro character better than do our northern and western comrades. Southern Socialists are already sufficiently criticized because we demand for the Negro economic justice. The adoption of this resolution by this body would be seized upon by every capitalist paper in the South, with the inevitable result of handicapping and retarding the Southern branch [where Negro labor predominates] of the Socialist movement for a good while to come.”

The picture is complete—obverse and reverse; all the completer seeing there are no other argumentators. It is the picture of the clash of bourgeois thought. Abstract “Justice,” on the one hand, so abstract as to be even imported from a foreign atmosphere; on the other hand, race prejudice, or what is even worse, cowardice towards race prejudice, even though the race consists mainly of proletarians. If the motion is carried, it is carried to the tune that voluntary soldiers are “members of our class”; if the motion is lost, it is lost to the tune that the white capitalists’ prejudice against the Negro, the bulk of the Southern proletariat, should not be assailed. In either case, lost or won, the incident of the motion illustrates the bourgeois essence of the S.P. and the clash of bourgeois thought in the party’s camp.

No wonder conviction spreads and strikes root that such a party is but a clown performance of Socialism in America.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

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