

## 'CARITAS IN VERITATE'

**From:** "B. Bortnick" <bortni9@...>

**Date:** July 13, 2009

**To:** "SLP" <socialists@slp.org>

**Subject:** Caritas in Veritate

Dear Comrade Bills,

Two things happened last week that serve to take the temperature of social disintegration. One was the disillusionment of assorted environmentalists with the tokenism of the Obama administration regarding global warming. A group rappelled down Mount Rushmore to hang a sign chastising Obama for being just another politician. The exasperation and rising concern among them may increase their awareness that capitalism must go and offer a more receptive body to the idea of socialism. Whether they were aware of Lincoln's famous statement that "Politicians are a group of men who have interests aside from those of the people" (may be slightly paraphrased) I don't know but it was significant that the sign showed a picture of Obama with a caption to the effect that the country needs leaders not politicians.

The other came out of the Papal state. Pope Benedict issued an encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate* ("Charity in Truth"), in which he opines if only the world were arranged in accordance with Roman Catholic precepts healing would be on its way. This encyclical was put together with a Cardinal Marx of Germany ostensibly to oppose the surging relevance of his namesake, Karl Marx. This article was carried in the Sunday edition of *The New York Times*, July 12, "The World" section of the paper, page 3, under the title "Catholicism as Antidote to Turbo-Capitalism." This in particular reminded me of Arnold Petersen's pamphlet on "Ultramontanism," that made the case about the basically political and class rule character of a church parading as a religion with a medieval agenda.

Fraternally,  
B. BORTNICK  
NEC Member

**From:** SLP <socialists@slp.org>

**Date:** July 13, 2009

**To:** Bernard Bortnick <bortni9@...>

**Subject:** Re: Caritas in Veritate

Dear Comrade Bortnick:

Thank you for your email of this morning under the above heading.

I was aware of the two developments you mention and thought that both provided some grist for the SLP mill, but particularly the latter.

As for the former, this is not the first time that those who have placed their faith in leaders who turn out to be simple charlatans and opportunists have been disillusioned. If there is a difference where Obama is concerned, I suppose it is in how quickly it came about. That alone may be a sign of progress, and that progress ought to be noted, but not overestimated. The working class grip on its illusions can be vise-like, and drawing attention to such errors in judgment is rarely sufficient to loosen that hold.

As for the latter, the first news item I saw on *Caritas in Veritate* appeared in *The Times* on Wednesday, July 8. I was particularly struck by the quotation ("financiers must rediscover the genuinely ethical foundation of their activity, so as not to abuse the sophisticated instruments which can serve to betray the interests of savers") taken from the text and went immediately to the Vatican's website to locate and download the entire document.

\*\*\*\*\*

I have not read it though as yet, but did note the following:

"8. In 1967, when he issued the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, my venerable predecessor Pope Paul VI illuminated the great theme of the development of peoples with the splendor of truth and the gentle light of Christ's charity....

"At a distance of over forty years from

the Encyclical's publication, I intend to pay tribute and to honour the memory of the great Pope Paul VI, revisiting his teachings on integral human development and taking my place within the path that they marked out, so as to apply them to the present moment. This continual application to contemporary circumstances began with the Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, with which the Servant of God Pope John Paul II chose to mark the twentieth anniversary of the publication of *Populorum Progressio*. Until that time, only *Rerum Novarum* had been commemorated in this way. Now that a further twenty years have passed, I express my conviction that *Populorum Progressio* deserves to be considered 'the *Rerum Novarum* of the present age,' shedding light upon humanity's journey towards unity."

What this put me in mind of was not so much Petersen's *Theocracy or Democracy?* (I think that's what you meant), but De Leon's 1891 editorial, "The Encyclical,"... the second and relevant half of which is in the pamphlet, *The Vatican in Politics*, which was originally titled Ultramontanism. Whether Pope Benedict's latest encyclical is meant "to oppose the surging relevance of... Karl Marx" or to clarify the church's position in the modern, post-Cold War world of "global capitalism" I cannot say without having read the entire document and digesting it well enough to synthesis its purpose, but for him to link it in a chain back to Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* is highly suggestive, to say the least.

Fraternally yours,  
ROBERT BILLS  
National Secretary

## SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE SPGB

By Bernard Bortnick

The Socialist Party of Great Britain, or World Socialist Party as it is known among its international affiliates, bears some deceptive similarities to the Socialist Labor Party. It opposes the "vanguard party" idea, reforms of capitalism, and favors a democratic society run by workers in which goods and services are produced for use and hues to the Marxian concept from each according to their abilities to each according to their needs. But a closer look, underline critical difference between the SPGB and the SLP. The following commentary is based upon 5 recent issues of the SPGB's monthly *Socialist Standard*.

### Marxist Basis

According to the SPGB's "Declaration of Principles" (reprinted unaltered in every issue of the *Socialist Standard* since 1904), the party advocates or recognizes that:

- Socialism is a society based upon common ownership and democratic control of production and distribution (Objective);

- They recognize exploitation of the working class by the capitalist class (1st paragraph);

- They recognize that the working class is the sole producer of wealth (1st paragraph);

- That the class struggle between workers and capitalists can only be resolved by the overthrow of the latter and conversion of private property into the common democratic ownership by "the whole people" (3rd paragraph);

- That emancipation of the working class must be accomplished by the working class itself (5th paragraph);

- That the revolutionary process requires the conversion of the political powers of the state "into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic" (6th paragraph) ("privilege, aristocratic" relates to lingering feudal titles and airs of royalty prevalent in Great Britain);

- SPGB in seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to all other political parties that otherwise do not have this position (7th paragraph)

- SPGB calls upon the working class for support while waging war against all other political parties (8th paragraph).

The most troubling part of this Declaration is the conflict between paragraph 6 and paragraph 3 and 5 calling for the conquest of "the powers of government that are to be converted from "an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation." How this is to be done is left to the imagination and certainly flies in the face of Marx's well known observation of one of the failures of the Paris Commune, that the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes. Buried in some past discussion, which I'm not aware of, is some rationalization of this contradiction.

Although the SLP supports contesting political offices of the capitalist state, it does so in order to propagate the program of the party and, if elected using, such offices to oppose legislation contrary to working class interests; but ultimately, with a plurality, to eliminate all political offices while the seat of government is transferred to the organized industrial constituencies that the working class has established through their Industrial Union governmental structure.

In this regard, notably absent from the Declaration, and indeed their periodical, is any hint or word about unionism, class conscious unionism or otherwise; for if the means of production are to be democratically owned and operated in behalf of society, where is the organizational lever that is to effect this revolutionary change? They insist that it is seizure of the offices of the political state. In fact, in the five issues of *Socialist Standard* that I received, not a word is to be found about unionism or organized actions of segments of the working class in Great Britain or anywhere else. The constant and incessant struggles at the workplace are just ignored, whether organized or otherwise.

Marx offered at least one important clue to the working class movement about the role of the unions at the end of *Value Price and Profit*, in noting that "They fail generally from limiting themselves to a guerilla war against the effects of the existing system, instead of simultaneously trying to change it, instead of using their organized forces as a lever for the final emancipation of the working class, that is to say the ultimate abolition of the wages system." (My emphasis) Marx was telling Socialists that workers should be organized at the point of production to oppose the wages system. Certainly the phrase "limiting themselves" suggests a larger role, if not a key role, of unionism. This is apparently completely lost on the SPGB adherents but it was not on De Leon and the SLP in its formative period. In fact, such observations impelled the SLP toward the concept of Socialist Industrial Unionism.

### Organization

The SPGB seems to be governed by an executive committee of 10 people that meets monthly, but major decisions are made by the membership as a whole meeting annually. There is no equivalent of a National Secretary as a point correspondent. Also, there is no editor of the party paper, but an editorial committee. It may be that material conditions in Great Britain, with denser populations and viable mass transit, favor this arrangement. Moreover, early in its formative period the SPGB forbade "leaders" per se. This may have something to do with the dominant figure of Hyndman in the split from the reformist Social Democratic Federation in 1904, although I am not clear on this matter. In any case, they are adamant that there be no leaders within the party, reflecting their aversion to any sort of leadership role within the new society.

### Establishing Socialism

The SPGB insists that socialism is not possible on an individual national basis.

(Continued on page 2)

## THE FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC CRISIS

By Edward Leader

The main reason for the financial and economic crisis that we are faced with is that capitalism has a long-term tendency toward stagnation. This is due to the following factors:

1. The working class is exploited or robbed at the point of production by the capitalist class. The workers receive only a small portion, in the form of wages, of the wealth that they produce. The lion's share, known as surplus value goes to the capitalist class.

2. The capacity to produce increases at a much faster rate than capacity to consume.

3. In spite of profligate living and conspicuous consumption by the capitalist class, some reinvestment in new plant and equipment, wasteful expenditures for advertising, and especially wasteful and enormous expenditures for military and warfare purposes by the government, a surplus remains that is not consumed from the surplus value.

4. As a result, there is little incentive to invest in new plant and equipment, which would increase the productive capacity. This applies to monopoly capitalism in which several huge corporations dominate and control the production of automobiles, steel, rubber, and appliances, and other major commodities. Production is cut back; there is underutilization of existing plant and equipment, and there is unemployment and underemployment.

The long-term tendency toward stagnation was the underlying cause of the Great Depression. The immediate cause was the financial speculation in the stock market that bought about the 1929 crash, which in turn brought on the economic crisis that resulted in the Great Depression. Despite a temporary and slow recovery that came about because of New Deal reform measures, the U.S. economy went into a slump in 1937 and 1938. World War II pulled the United States out of the depression.

At the end of World War II, the United States entered a postwar boom that lasted until the late 1960's. Then the long-term tendency toward stagnation resumed. Instead of investing the part of the surplus value in new plant and equipment that would increase the productive capacity, there was investment and speculation in stocks, bonds, options, and exotic instruments such as collateralized mortgage obligations (CMO's), mortgage backed securities, and derivatives. This investment and speculation in financial instruments resulted in the build-up of a huge credit bubble and the creation of phantom wealth or what Karl Marx referred to as fictitious capital. There was no corresponding increase in real social wealth, that is, tangible goods and services, which are the product of human labor.

This huge credit bubble finally burst and has affected the so-called real economy. The best that President Obama can do with his stimulus package is to slow and stop the increasing unemployment rate and home foreclosures, and thereby ease the pain and suffering of the working class. He will not be able to revive the economy. There may be a temporary recovery only to result in a slump as occurred in 1937-38. The bailout package for the banks and other financial institutions amounts to nationalizing the loss and privatizing the gain for these outfits. This is outright theft of the public treasury by finance capital. Finance capital has predominant control of the government and has this nation by the throat.

We know what the answer is—socialism. After numerous failed attempts to improve their lot under capitalism during this crisis, with proper education and outreach, the working class will organize industrially and politically and usher in the Socialist Republic of Free and Affluent Labor.

## THE MOST IMPORTANT CLASS?

July 3, 2009

Robert Bills  
SLP  
Dear Bob:

I was talking to my uncle... and he told me that there is *The People's Resumption Fund*. Enclosed is a check for that fund.

Attached is a letter that I had published in the San Pedro newspaper, *Random Lengths*. I thought that you... might like to read it since I did mention who is the most important class.

Sincerely yours,  
JOHN M. LAMBASE

August 14, 2009

John M. Lambase  
San Pedro, CA  
Dear Mr. Lambase:

Please accept my apology for not responding to your letter of July 3 and thanking you for your contribution to *The People's Resumption Fund* long ago. One of the problems of not having a regular office, as in the past, is that much of my time is taken by other concerns than those directly affecting the SLP. That, and the added fact that most of what can be done in the current circumstances must be done by me alone is not conducive to "moving things along" as smoothly as when Donna and I still formed a full-time team. At any rate, I am sorry and extend my sincerest apology.

I read your letter to *Random Lengths* with interest and confirmed its publication in the July 3–16 issue by visiting the website—not because I doubted you, but because you neglected to mention the date. I noticed some minor differences, primarily paraphrasing, from the version you sent, but otherwise both appear to be virtually identical. I probably don't need to say that I wished you had taken the added step of mentioning the SLP by name, but that did not detract from the central point you were making.

I should add that I intend to publish your letter to *Random Lengths* in the September issue of the *SLP Newsletter*. Although the newsletter is generally circulated within the Party only, I will send you a copy when it is done, probably late next week or early the week after.

Sincerely yours,  
ROBERT BILLS  
National Secretary

*The Attachment—*

### Who is the Most Important Class?

Who do I consider the most important people? The workers who are the trash collectors, power plant workers that produce electricity, and those that provide water. What if the trash was not picked up and the electricity and water were shut off for an extended period of time.

Me and my family health and survival is control by those workers who operate these industries. That is the reason these workers are important and there are many others.

How can workers feel important since they are a commodity in the labor market? Many workers are competing for very few jobs in the labor market. Those that are working are wondering will they be the next to lose their jobs. Television shows the unemployed sad faces at the state offices when they apply for their unemployed insurance checks. When workers lose their jobs it is easy to understand why they might not feel important.

Lincoln expressed how important workers are. "Labor is prior to, and independent of capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor, and could never have existed if labor had not first existed. Labor is the superior of capital, and deserves much the higher consideration."

The mission of capitalism is to constantly reduce the cost of labor since it greatly affects profit. Globalization and workers competing for jobs has contributed greatly to reducing labor cost. Competition between the corporations that sell the same product forces them also to reduce the cost of labor. Therefore the workers can not get any consideration.

The rich founding fathers purpose was to devised a constitution benefiting the

capitalist class. The capitalist class politicians passed laws that make it difficult for workers to join a union. There is a bill in congress to ease the restrictions on joining a union and it is meeting stiff opposition in congress. The stiff opposition is complying with the mission of capitalism.

The working class is the most important class since everybody in the country is dependent upon them to keep our complex society functioning. Paraphrasing what Lincoln said, "The capitalist class could never have existed without the working class."

JOHN M. LAMBASE  
San Pedro, CA

(Mr. Lambase is a former member of the SLP. The San Pedro *Random Lengths*, a weekly, printed his letter in its issue of July 3–10.)

### ... SPGB

(Continued from page 1)

They take their departure from the fact that capitalism is a world system, inasmuch as nation states linger on. Great Britain is a part of the EU, and in accord with its development and amalgamation into a single political entity theoretically their position seems to be correct. However, EU working class unity, and world working class unity, seem remote considering that even among various capitalist states working class unity has yet to be achieved. This apparently reinforces their inclination to address the working class as an undifferentiated mass, "the electorate," not as workers with the potential for unity at the point of production.

The SPGB advocates the end of the profit system, capitalism. It proposes that this be done by "the electorate" (working class?) acting "for themselves organizing democratically and without leaders to bring about the kind of society" they advocate in their publication. This "immaculate conception" will come about with a plurality of SPGB candidates elected to political office. What happens after that is unclear, with the following qualification: "... the more of you who join the Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us." ("Introducing the Socialist Party," in every issue of the *Socialist Standard*) In other words, let's all get together and figure out what we are going to do, thereby putting organizing to a purpose in limbo.

### SPGB Paper

The *Socialist Standard* is a monthly with a magazine format of 24 pages, with outer dimensions of about 8.5" x 12" and an introductory cover about the major and minor items. Articles vary in focus, with some historical items, apparently well researched and written. Recent articles, for example, commented on the current state of the Japanese Communist Party, Sir Thomas More and the anniversary of Marx's *Critique of Political Economy*. There are always book reviews and news of meetings, lectures and debates. A number of party publications are advertised, as well as cups, DVD's and books. The SPGB conducts debates with other parties (Labor, Tory, etc.), anarchists, or apparently whoever rises to the challenge, and these are announced in the periodical. They are in this sense confrontational and employ the debate format as a tactic. In four issues I counted 24 contributors, in-

cluding editorial staff. Some contributed more than one article.

## IN MEMORIAM

Irene Schelin

August 18, 2009

Dear Comrade Bills

Comrade Karl Heck and I sadly report the death in the month of June this year of Irene Schelin, of Duluth, Minnesota, at the age of 95. She was not a member, but a fellow worker who led a life of unwavering dedication towards supporting the Socialist Labor Party.

Her father, having experienced working class struggles in industrialized Europe, was able to form an SLP Section in the backwoods near Duluth during the closing of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. A time when walking trails were still used by Native Americans. In that rural area, roads were not much more than wagon trails. At that time a Native American presented Irene's father with a birch bark canoe.

We know of at least one other SLP Section, there might have been more, that was formed in the vicinity besides the one in Duluth. That these workers were able to form SLP sections in such an adverse setting is an indication of how powerful European workers' class consciousness was. So powerful that it was the force that set forth the *Communist Manifesto*. So powerful was such class consciousness that workers immigrating to the U.S. were able to build upon the SLP under a nation with capitalism in its infancy. A nation with a working class in its infancy.

The local Iron Range SLP members were making great strides in the early settlement of the territory but were soon stalled by the entrenchment of formidable adversaries; the barons of iron mining, timber and railroads.

The SLP sections were centered around a common language in the community as were the emerging labor unions that were being formed. The strategy of union organization was to form locals according to a common spoken language. Much like apartheid in South Africa forcibly separated and relocated members of tribes into new communities consisting of several mixed languages, the iron mining barons brought from Europe a much broader worker mixture of nationalities. They proceeded to hire, fire and replace workers, weakening union organizing by co-mingling several different worker nationalities and languages working at each mine location. In addition, a black list was circulated to all the mining, timber and railroads companies and towns. Once on that list, it was next to impossible for a worker to get a job and remaining in the area meant facing starvation.

Now all the anti-labor tactics used at that time are no longer necessary since worker's classconsciousness has been virtually eviscerated from their minds. Despite all the agitational work done by SLP members and sympathizers in that locality, they couldn't surmount the miserable lack of worker's class consciousness.

The timber is gone, the iron ore is gone, and the railroads don't have much to transport anymore. Not much basis left for attempting to persuade workers to organize industrially.

SLP members and supporters held and attended many SLP fundraising socials in the Duluth area. As far as Comrade Heck and I know, Irene never failed to attend whenever she was able to. Any

time that Karl and I attended those socials, which was often, Irene was always there offering her support by providing food and contributing to the SLP.

Regrettably, Comrade Heck and I don't have the camaraderie of other Minnesota SLP members anymore and are fast losing the camaraderie of scant few SLP supporters left.

In closing, Comrade Heck and I each contribute \$100 to the SLP in memory of Irene Schelin.

Fraternally submitted,  
DONALD J. DONAKER  
National-Member-at-Large

Frank Ufert

August 21, 2009

Robert Bills

National Secretary  
Dear Comrade Bills:

It is with deep regret that I must inform you of the death of Comrade Frank Ufert who died... on July 24 at the age of 75.... Enclosed are copies of the Memorial Gathering notice and the speech I gave at his memorial on August 3.

\* \* \*

Fraternally yours,  
EDWARD LEADER  
For Section New York City

*Frank Ufert Memorial—*

I am Edward Leader, a member of the Socialist Labor Party. I came here to pay respect to our deceased comrade and friend, Frank Ufert. Frank joined the Socialist Labor Party in November 1996. Prior to his joining the SLP, he was a long-time Party sympathizer. His parents were also members of the Socialist Labor Party.

Frank was an energetic, active, and very knowledgeable sympathizer and member. At many of our business meetings, he initiated stimulating and lively discussions on the issues of the day. He clearly demonstrated how these issues, or rather social ills, arise from the normal operations the capitalist system. He told interesting and relevant stories of his experiences when he worked for OSHA, that is, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. He explained its inadequacies and limits as an enforcement agency.

Under capitalism the working class receives in wages only a small fraction of the wealth that it alone produces. The productive capacity increases at a much faster rate than the consumption capacity. There is a long term tendency toward stagnation. This is the root cause of the economic and financial mess that we are in.

In order to seriously address and eventually eliminate these evils, namely poverty, war, unemployment, racism, political repression, gross violations of our civil liberties, just to name a few (the list is incomplete), this requires a socialist transformation of society. Our conception or definition of socialism is not that of a totalitarian state like the former Soviet Union. Nor does socialism mean government ownership.

Socialism is a system in which the means of production, distribution, and social services are collectively owned by the people and are democratically operated and controlled by the people through an industrially based government. There will no longer be class divisions and a wage system. Production will be carried on for use and not for sale with a view to profit. There will no longer be a political state. The new government will be based on industry instead of territory and property. Its function will be to plan, administer, and coordinate production instead of being an engine of oppression.

We call upon the working class and other progressive minded people to consider the program of the Socialist Labor Party. The working class should organize politically and industrially to usher in the socialist commonwealth of free and affluent labor.

We will sorely miss Frank Ufert. We can best honor and pay our respects to Frank Ufert by carrying on the work that he did in trying to get our message across to the working class.

## THE PEOPLE'S RESUMPTION FUND

The People  
P.O. Box 218  
Mountain View, CA 94042-0218

Dear Friends:

Enclosed is my contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for *The People's Resumption Fund*. Please do everything possible to put *The People* back in print again soon.

NAME .....

ADDRESS ..... APT. ....

CITY ..... STATE ..... ZIP .....

Or click here to contribute online: <http://www.slp.org/support.html>

Explore @ [www.slp.org](http://www.slp.org)

Marx, Engels, De Leon and more