Debs on the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht, and the example of the Bolsheviks

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Bernie Sanders is attempting to hijack the historical reputation and revolutionary example of German socialist leader Rosa Luxemburg for the benefit of his right-wing campaign to preserve the domination of the Democratic Party and the trade union bureaucracy. Sanders falsifies the circumstances of the murder of Luxemburg by militarist thugs acting under the orders of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, which had betrayed the working class by supporting World War I, and was placed in power at the end of the war in order to prevent a proletarian revolution. (See Bernie Sanders falsifies the political legacy of Rosa Luxemburg).

The epilogue of the new biography of Eugene Debs attempts to do something of a similar kind, portraying the right-wing, pro-Democratic Party scheming of the Democratic Socialists of America as the continuation of his work. Debs was an intransigent fighter for the political independence of the working class from capitalist politics, and particularly from the Democratic Party. Debs was jailed by two different Democratic administrations, first for organizing a nationwide rail strike in 1894, then for opposing the imperialist First World War in 1918.

In that political context, it is worth reviewing what Debs actually wrote in February 1919 about Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht—and the Bolshevik leaders Lenin and Trotsky—only days after Luxemburg and Liebknecht were murdered at the behest of the Social Democratic Party government of Friedrich Ebert and Philip Scheidemann, and on the orders of "socialist" defense minister Gustav Noske.

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The Day of the People has arrived

Upon his release from the Kaiser's bastille—the doors of which were torn from their hinges by the proletarian revolution—Karl Liebknecht, heroic leader of the rising hosts, exclaimed: "The Day of the People has arrived!" It was a magnificent challenge to the Junkers and an inspiring battle-cry to the aroused workers.

From that day to this Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg and other true leaders of the German proletariat have stood bravely at the front, appealing to the workers to join the revolution and make it complete by destroying what remained of the criminal and corrupt old regime and ushering in the day of the people. Then arose the cry that the people were not yet ready for their day, and Ebert and Scheidemann and their crowd of white-livered reactionaries, with the sanction and support of the fugitive Kaiser, the infamous Junkers arid all the allied powers, now in beautiful alliance, proceeded to prove that the people were not yet ready to rule themselves by setting up a bourgeois government under which the working class should remain in substantially the same state of slavish subjection they were in at the beginning of the war.

And now upon that issue—as to whether the terrible war has brought the people their day or whether its appalling sacrifices have all been in vain—the battle is raging in Germany as in Russia, and the near future will determine whether revolution has for once been really triumphant or whether sudden reaction has again won the day.

In the struggle in Russia the revolution has thus far triumphed for the reason that it has not compromised. The career of Kerensky was cut short when he attempted to turn the revolutionary tide into reactionary bourgeois channels.

Lenin and Trotsky were the men of the hour and under their fearless, incorruptible and uncompromising leadership the Russian proletariat has held the fort against the combined assaults of all the ruling class powers of earth. It is a magnificent spectacle. It stirs the blood and warms the heart of every revolutionist, and it challenges the admiration of all the world.

So far as the Russian proletariat is concerned, the day of the people has arrived, and they are fighting and dying as

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only heroes and martyrs can fight and die to usher in the day of the people not only in Russia but in all the nations on the globe.

In every revolution of the past the false and cowardly plea that the people were “not yet ready” has prevailed. Some intermediate class invariably supplanted the class that was overthrown and “the people” remained at the bottom where they have been since the beginning of history. They have never been “ready” to rid themselves of their despots, robbers and parasites. All they have ever been ready for has been to exchange one brood of vampires for another to drain their veins and fatten in their misery.

That was Kerensky’s doctrine in Russia and it is Scheidemann’s doctrine in Germany. They are both false prophets of the people and traitors to the working class, and woe be to their deluded followers if their vicious reaction triumphs, for then indeed will the yokes be fastened afresh upon their scarred and bleeding necks for another generation.

When Kerensky attempted to side-track the revolution in Russia by joining forces with the bourgeoisie he was lauded by the capitalist press of the whole world. When Scheidemann patriotically rushed to the support of the Kaiser and the Junkers at the beginning of the war, the same [pro-Allied] press denounced him as the betrayer of socialism and the enemy of the people. And now this very press lauds him to the heavens as the savior of the German nation! Think of it! Scheidemann the traitor has become Scheidemann the hero of the bourgeoisie. Could it be for any other reason on earth than that Scheidemann is doing the dirty work of the capitalist class?

And all this time the prostitute press of the robber regime of the whole world is shrieking hideously against Bolshevism. “It is worse than Kaiserism” is the burden of their cry. Certainly it is. They would a thousand times rather have the Kaiser restored to his throne than to see the working class rise to power. In the latter event they cease to rule, their graft is gone and their class disappears, and well do they know it. That is what we said from the beginning and for which we have been sentenced as disloyalists and traitors.

Scheidemann and his breed do not believe that the day of the people has arrived. According to them the war and the revolution have brought the day of the bourgeoisie. Mr. Bourgeois is now to take the place of Mr. Junker—to evolute into another Junker himself by and by—while Mr. Wage-Slave remains where he was before, under the heels of his master, and all he gets out of the carnage, in which his blood dyed the whole earth, is a new set of heels to grind into his exploited bones and a fresh and lusty vampire to drain his life-blood.

Away with all such perfidious doctrines; forever away with such a vicious subterfuge and treacherous betrayal!

The people are ready for their day. THE PEOPLE, I say. Yes, the people!

Who are the people? The people are the working class, the lower class, the robbed, the oppressed, the impoverished, the great majority of the earth. They and those who sympathize with them are THE PEOPLE, and they who exploit the working class, and the mercenaries and menials who aid and abet the exploiters, are the enemies of the people.

That is the attitude of Lenin and Trotsky in Russia and was of Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg in Germany, and this accounts for the flood of falsehood and calumny which poured upon the heads of the brave leaders and their revolutionary movement from the filthy mouthpieces of the robber regime of criminal capitalism throughout the world.

The rise of the working class is the red spectre in the bourgeois horizon. The red cock shall never crow. Anything but that! The Kaiser himself will be pitied and forgiven if he will but roll his eyes heavenward, proclaim the menace of Bolshevism, and appeal to humanity to rise in its wrath and stamp out this curse to civilization.

And still the “curse” continues to spread—like a raging conflagration it leaps from shore to shore. The reign of capitalism and militarism has made of all peoples inflammable material. They are ripe and ready for the change, the great change which means the rise and triumph of the workers, the end of exploitation, of war and plunder, and the emancipation of the race. Let it come! Let us all help its coming and pave the way for it by organizing the workers industrially and politically to conquer capitalism and usher in the day of the people.

In Russia and Germany our valiant comrades are leading the proletarian revolution, which knows no race, no color, no sex, and no boundary lines. They are setting the heroic example for worldwide emulation. Let us, like them, scorn and repudiate the cowardly compromisers within our own ranks, challenge and defy the robber-class power, and fight it out on that line to victory or death!

From the crown of my head to the soles of my feet I am Bolshevik, and proud of it.

“The Day of the People has arrived!”

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