

Open letter to Lenin - Sylvia Pankhurst



Open letter from Sylvia Pankhurst and the Workers' Dreadnaught to Lenin, accusing the Third International parties of abandoning communism.

To Lenin, as representing the Russian Communist Party and the Russian Soviet Government.

We address you as representative of the Russian Soviet Government and the Russian Communist Party. With deep regret we have observed you hauling down the flag of Communism and abandoning the cause of the emancipation of the workers. With profound sorrow we have watched the development of your policy of making peace with Capitalism and reaction.

Why have you done this?

It seems that you have lost faith in the possibility of securing the emancipation of the workers and the establishment of world Communism in our time. You have preferred to retain office under Capitalism than to stand by Communism and fall with it if need be.

Yet if a great call, a high call, and a disinterested call to Communism might go out to the people at this time, from some source that could inspire them with trust, it seems that, in the terrible circumstances of the present hour, it must bear tremendous fruit. A period of great misery has fallen upon the peoples; they are suffering great bitterness in the bondage of this ruthless system of Capitalism, which is decaying from the awful and overwhelming growth of its own iniquities.

The exchanges are rising on the one hand, falling on the other, with a startling velocity, which is reflected in the miseries of the people. In the lands of high exchange values falls the blight of unemployment and lowered wages; in the lands of low exchanges is the merciless increase of prices, which forces the toilers to work, faster and ever faster, whilst starvation and want drain them, like cruel leeches, of the very life force they are expending, with desperate recklessness, upon their ill- required toil.

The financial manipulators rule the world; they are the real Governments; and these puppet Governments, which take the stage for a time, must do their bidding or disappear from the scene.

In Italy we see once more the collapse of the old politics; but it is an evil and vile reaction which, in the shape of Fascism, has taken advantage of the general disgust with the sham fights and the futile tinkering and marking time of the Capitalist politicians. The Fascisti have acted. Because whilst others have so long been content only to talk through the welter of popular distress, the Fascisti, though with wickedness,

have acted, multitudes have either followed them, or at least have refrained from actively opposing them. Because the talkers have only talked, no force has opposed the violence of the Fascisti,

The Fascisti have provided a means of existence, even though it is gained by the murder and terrorism of their class brothers and sisters, to masses of destitute demobilised soldiers. The talkers have done not even that; they have spoken of general well-being, but have produced nothing. Reformism can produce nothing of permanent value; it cannot change the essential features of Capitalism which are grinding the agonised masses between the upper and nether millstones.

These days of great misfortune are revealing, with piercing and ruthless clarity, the utter powerlessness of those who would reform the iniquitous system and would heal the grievous wounds which it inflicts. 'Work or maintenance for the unemployed', cries the reformist. In so far as the claim is conceded, the local burden of the concession is immediately placed on the shoulders of the working-class householders and their families and lodgers. In so far as unemployment maintenance is made, what is described as a national charge, it is transmitted, in the great complexities of the Capitalist system, into higher prices and reduced remuneration to the wage-earning community, which, having nothing to sell save its labour, has no means of recouping itself for its losses in the labour market and reduced purchasing power, since it cannot pass on its burden to be borne by someone else.

So it is with all the reforms projected by the reformer, in so far as they ever pass beyond the stage of discussion, for the populations of the world are in the grip of the great Capitalists, and there is no possibility of improvement till that stranglehold has been destroyed.

Even the most ignorant and unsophisticated are to-day instinctively aware of this; they realise that the reformist and his panaceas cannot help them; they observe, on the contrary, that every action of that costly monstrosity, the Capitalist Government, is attended by a devastating increase of parasitic and opulent administrators, the burden of whose maintenance, since they cannot pass it on to others, always falls on the classes least able to bear it. Realising their hopeless position under Capitalism, the people sink into spiritless apathy, concentrating on the effort to maintain an individual existence. In fear of a catastrophic future, they long vainly for a return to the grey humdrum of the pre-war struggle, which was less fierce than this of to-day.

Urgent is the need for the strong call to Communism, the clear explanation of the Communist life: its sane and wholesome mutual service: its large and all-embracing fraternity: its escape from this nightmare of poverty and power.

What have you done, O one-time trumpet of revolution? In your impatience of the slow awakening of far multitudes, you have turned your face from the world's lowly and enslaved. You have dabbled in the juggleries of Capitalist diplomacy; you have bartered and bargained with the destinies of the Russian proletariat; and broadcasted the message of your own desertion of Communism, wrapped up in tortuous and misleading casuistry, to the Communist movement throughout the world. By your subtle and specious arguments, and by the glamour of the Russian Revolution, through which you were regarded, you have diverted from the quest of Communism many who had been aroused by the call of Soviet Russia. Therefore we find those who lately set out bearing the standard of Communism, now working to place in power a Party which openly declares its opposition to Communism.

Therefore, instead of placing the knowledge of Communism before the peoples, we find the parties of the Third International urging the masses to continue fighting for a hotchpotch of futile and impossible reforms.

Published in Workers' Dreadnought, 4 November 1922. Taken from the Antagonism website.