

# OPEN LETTER TO COMRADE LENIN.

## An Answer to Lenin's Brochure: "LEFT WING COMMUNISM: AN INFANTILE DISORDER."

By HERMAN GORTER.

(Continued from last issue.)

oretically, therefore, and apart from private  
ances, minor questions and excrescences, which,  
those of Wollheim and Laufenberg, are in-  
le in the first phases of a movement, the  
taken by these parties and comrades is quite  
and your opposition absolutely wrong.\*  
going from the East to the West of Europe,  
verse at a given moment an economic bound-  
It runs from the Baltic to the Mediterranean,  
here from Danzig to Venice. This line divides  
ords. West of this line there is a practically  
e domination of the industrial, commercial  
nancial capital, united in the most highly  
ed banking capital. Even the agricultural  
is subject to, or has been compelled to  
with this capital. This capital is organised  
at least in degree, and converges in the most  
established State Governments of the world.  
of the line there is neither the gigantic  
With the industrial, commercial, transport and  
of the capital, nor its almost absolute domina-  
gion, consequently, the firmly established mod-  
ate.  
It is not possible, indeed, if the tactics of the  
volutionary proletariat west of this boundary-  
line are the same as in the east!

**II. THE QUESTION OF THE TRADE UNIONS.**  
I will now proceed to prove, also by  
the fact that the Left Wing in Germany and Eng-  
land is right in general principles—in the ques-  
tion of the Trade Unions and of parliamentarism.  
we will take the question of the Trade

parliamentarism embodies the spiritual, thus  
Trade Union movement embodies the material  
over of the leaders over the masses of the workers.  
Under capitalism the Trade Unions constitute the  
Capitalist organisations for uniting the proletariat, and  
such Marx, already from the very beginning,  
demonstrated their importance. Under a more  
developed capitalism, and to a greater extent even  
the age of imperialism, the Trade Unions have  
more become gigantic unions, with a trend of  
development, equal to that of the bourgeois State  
They themselves. They have produced a class of  
bureaucrats, a bureaucracy, that disposes of all engines  
power of the organisation, the finances, the Press,  
appointing of lower officials; often it is in-  
vested with even greater power, so that from a  
want of the rank and file, it has become the  
H. S. S. D. R. identifying itself with the organisation. The  
Trade Unions can be compared to the State and its  
bureaucracy, also in this: that, notwithstanding the  
democracy that is supposed to reign there, the mem-  
bers are unable to enforce their will against the  
bureaucracy; every revolt is broken against the cle-  
vly constructed apparatus of official ordinances and  
minutes, before it has been able even to shake  
highest regions.  
It is only at the cost of the most tenacious  
severance that every now and then an organiza-  
tion manages in the course of years to obtain a  
change of persons. In the last few years, be-  
fore and after the war, in England, Germany, and  
America, this often gave rise to rebellions of the  
members, who started strikes on their own account,  
against the will of the leaders, or the decrees of  
the union itself. That this should seem natural, and  
accepted as such, is an indication in itself that  
the organisation does not represent the total of the  
members, but something altogether foreign to them;  
the workers do not have the control of their  
union, but that the union is placed over them  
an outward power against which they can rebel—  
power which, all the same, has its origin in  
themselves: again, therefore, an ally with the State.  
In spite of the hatred and impotent exas-  
eration of the masses, this domination manages to  
maintain itself, owing to the indifference and lack  
clear insight, and of a united, indomitable will  
the masses, and upheld as it is by the inner need  
of the Trade Unions, the only means the workers  
to gain strength through unity, in their strug-  
gle against capital.

**Waning of T. U. Influence.**  
Fighting against capital, in a constant oppo-  
sition against its tendencies of increased misery, and  
enabling the working class, through the restriction  
of these tendencies, to keep in existence the Trade  
Union movement, has played its part under capi-  
talism, and has thus become itself a member of  
capitalist society. It is only at the beginning of  
revolution, when the proletariat, from a mem-  
ber of this society, is turned into the annihilator  
of this society, that the Trade Union finds it-  
self in opposition to the proletariat.  
State: that its organisation, in spite of for-  
mal democracy, renders it impossible to turn it  
into an instrument of the proletarian revolution,  
and also hold good therefore for the Trade Union  
organisations. Their counter-revolutionary power can-  
not be destroyed or weakened through a change  
of staff, through the replacing of reactionary lead-  
ers by radical or revolutionary elements.

It is the form of organisation that renders the  
masses as good as powerless, and prevents them  
from turning the Trade Unions into the organs of  
their will. The revolution can triumph only if it  
completely destroys this organisation: that is to say,  
if it alters the form of organisation so fundamentally  
as to turn it into something altogether different.  
The Soviet system, the construction from within,  
is not only able to uproot and abolish the State,  
but also the Trade Union bureaucracy: it will con-  
stitute not only the new political organs of the  
proletariat as opposed to capitalism, but likewise  
the foundation for the new Trade Unions. In the  
party factions in Germany, the idea of a form  
of organisation being revolutionary has been mock-  
ed at, because it is only the revolutionary sentiment,  
the revolutionary mind of the members, that matters.  
However, if the most important part of the revolu-  
tion consists in the masses conducting their own  
concerns—the control of society and the produc-  
tion—then every form of organisation that does not  
allow the masses to rule and to guide for them-  
selves, must needs be counter-revolutionary and  
harmful, and as such it must be replaced by an-  
other form, which is revolutionary in so far that  
it allows the workers to decide matters for them-  
selves.

Through their very nature the Trade Unions are  
useless arms for the West-European revolution!  
Apart from the fact that they have become tools of  
capitalism, and that they are in the hands of  
traitors, apart from the fact that through their  
nature they are bound to make slaves of the mem-  
bers, no matter what the leaders may be, they  
are also unfit for general use.

**The Harder Task of Europe.**  
The Trade Unions are too weak in the contest  
against the most highly-organised capital in West-  
ern-European States. These latter are powerful:  
the unions are not. To a great extent the Trade  
Unions are Professional Unions as yet, which can-  
not make a revolution, if it were for that fact  
alone. And in so far as they are industrial unions,  
they are not founded on the industries, on the  
workshops themselves, and are consequently weak.  
Also they are more unions for help than for fight-  
ing, dated as they do from the days of the small  
bourgeoisie. Even before the revolution, their or-  
ganisation was already inadequate for the strug-  
gle; for the Revolution itself it cannot serve at  
all—in Western Europe. For the industries, the  
workers in the industries, make the revolution, not  
in the industries and profession, but in the work-  
shops. Moreover, these unions are far too slow-  
working, complicated instruments, good for the time  
of evolution only. Even if the revolution should  
not succeed right away, and we had once more to  
revert to peaceful action for a while, the Trade  
Unions would have to be destroyed and replaced by  
industrial unions, on a basis of industrial or work-  
shop organisation. And with these miserable Trade  
Unions, that must be done away with in any case,  
they want to make the revolution! The workers  
in Western Europe need WEAPONS for the revolu-  
tion. The only weapons for the revolution in  
Western Europe are the Industrial Organisations.  
And these united into ONE big whole!

The workers in Western Europe need the very  
best weapons. They stand alone: they have no  
help. And therefore they need these industrial or-  
ganisations. In Germany and England they need  
them at once, because there the revolution is nearest  
at hand. The other countries must have them as  
soon as possible, as soon as we can erect them.  
It is no good at all, Comrade Lenin, your saying:  
In Russia we did it in such and such a way,  
for in the first place you had no organisations that  
were so inadequate for the struggle as many of the  
Trade Unions are here. You had industrial unions.  
Secondly, your workers were more revolutionary in  
spirit. Thirdly, the organisation of the capitalists  
was weak; and the State also. And in the fourth  
place, and this is the main point: you had help.  
You did not need the very best of weapons. We  
stand alone, we must have them. We will not win  
unless we have them. We will be defeated over  
and over again, unless we have them.

Also other grounds, as well as material, prove  
this.  
Recall in your mind, Comrade, how things were  
in Germany, before and during the war. The Trade  
Unions, the far too weak but only means, were en-  
tirely in the hands of the leaders, who used them  
as dead machines on behalf of capitalism. Then  
the revolution broke out. The Trade Unions were  
used by the leaders and the masses of members as a  
weapon against the revolution. It was through their  
help, through their co-operation, through their  
leaders, nay, partly even through their members that  
the revolution was murdered. The Communists saw  
their own brothers being shot with the co-operation  
of the Trade Unions. Strikes in favour of the re-  
volution were prevented, rendered impossible. Do  
you hold it possible, Comrade, that under such  
conditions revolutionary workers should remain in  
those unions? Especially when these latter are ut-  
terly inadequate instruments for the revolution! In  
my opinion this is a psychical impossibility. What  
would you yourself have done, as member of a polit-  
ical party, that of the Mensheviks for instance,  
if these had acted thus in the revolution? You

would have split the Party (if you had not already  
done so before)! You will reply: This was a polit-  
ical party, it is different in the case of a Trade  
Union. I believe you are mistaken. In the revolu-  
tion, during the revolution, every Trade Union,  
every workers' union even, is a political party—  
either pro- or counter-revolutionary.

In your article, however, you say, and you will  
do so now: These emotional impulses must be con-  
quered, for the sake of unity and Communist prop-  
aganda. I will show you, by means of concrete  
examples, that during the revolution this was im-  
possible in Germany. For these questions must al-  
so be considered quite concretely. Let us sup-  
pose that Germany had 100,000 really revolutionary  
dock labourers, 100,000 revolutionary metal workers,  
and 100,000 revolutionary miners; that these were  
willing to strike, to fight, to die for the revolu-  
tion, and that the other millions were not. What  
are these 300,000 to do? They must in the first  
place unite, and form a fighting league. This you  
acknowledge. Without organisation workers can do  
nothing. Now a new league against old unions,  
even if the workers remain in the old ones, is a  
split already; if not formally, at any rate actually,  
in reality. Next, however, the members of the  
new league need a press, meetings, localities, a  
salaried staff. This requires heaps of money. And  
the German workers possess next to nothing. In  
order to keep the new league going, they must  
needs, whether they like it or not, leave the old  
one. Thus we see that, concretely considered, that  
which you, Comrade, propose, is impossible.

**Build on New Foundations.**  
However, there are better material grounds yet. id  
The German workers who left the Trade Unions, that  
wished to destroy them, that created the indus- og  
trial organisations and workers' unions, stood IN  
THE REVOLUTION. It was necessary to fight with  
ONCE. The revolution was there. The Trade  
Unions refused to fight. What is the good then  
saying: Remain in the Trade Unions, propaga-  
your ideas, you will grow stronger, and become a  
majority. Apart from the fact that the minor-  
ity would be strangled, as is the custom there, that  
would be quite fine, and also the Left Wing would  
try it, if there were only time to do so. But it  
was impossible to wait. The revolution had be-  
gun. And it is still going on!

IN THE REVOLUTION (mind, Comrade, it was  
in the revolution that the German workers split  
the Party, and created their Workers' Union) the  
revolutionary workers will always separate themselves  
from the social-patriots. In the struggle no other  
way is possible. No matter what you, and the Mos-  
cow Executive, and the International Congress say,  
and no matter how much you dislike a split in  
the Party, it will always take place, on psychic  
and material grounds, because the workers cannot  
in the long run tolerate the Trade Unions to  
them, and because there has to be fighting.

That is why the Left Wing has created the  
ers' Unions; and as they believe that the  
tion in Germany is not over yet, but  
ceed to the final victory, they keep them **WORKERS.**  
Comrade Lenin, is there another way out  
workers' movement, when two trends are  
that of fighting? And when these two trends  
divergent, if they oppose one another, how is  
other way but secession? Did you ever see  
any other? And is there anything more oppo-  
than revolution and counter-revolution?

For this reason again the K.A.P.D. and the Gen-  
eral Workers' Unions are quite right.  
And, Comrade, have not these secessions, these  
clearances ever been a blessing for the proletariat?  
Does not this always become evident after a while in  
I have some experience in this matter. When we  
yet belonged to the social-patriotic party we had  
no influence—after our expulsion we had some—but  
the beginning, and very soon we won a great, a  
very great influence. And how about you, the Bol-  
shevists, after the secession? I believe you fared  
quite well. Small influence at first, very much  
later on. And all now. It all depends on the  
economic and political development, whether a  
group, be it ever so small, does become the most  
powerful party. If the revolution in Germany lasts,  
there is a fair hope that the importance and the  
influence of the workers' unions will surpass all  
the others. You should not be intimidated by their  
numbers—70,000 against seven millions. Smaller  
groups than these have become the strongest—the  
Bolsheviks, among others!

The industrial unions and workshop organisations,  
and the Workers' Unions that are based on them  
and formed from them, why are they such excellent  
weapons for the revolution in Western Europe, the  
best weapons even together with the Communist Par-  
ties? Because the workers act for themselves, infi-  
nitely more so than they did in the old Trade  
Unions, because now they control their leaders, and  
thereby the entire leadership, and because they have  
the supervision of the industrial organisation, and  
thereby of the entire union.

\* It has struck me that in this controversy you  
almost invariably make use of private, and not pub-  
lic views of the opposition.  
To be continued.







# Workers' Breadnought

FOR INTERNATIONAL COMMUNISM.

Founded and Edited by  
SYLVIA PANKHURST.

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## RANK TALK TO SOCIALISTS ON THE NEED OF TO-DAY.

By FRED TYLER.

**Sitting in Wait for Plums to Fall in the Lap will not Achieve Advance. -- The Ineffectiveness of High-Brow Resolutions and the Need of Personal Service.**

In the innermost recesses of the heart of the Socialist movement there exists a poison-  
vth of grave danger.

The demon of fatalism, an extraordinary  
rich dwarfs the power of propaganda.  
Theory runs as follows, and is chanted in  
in all countries: "Capitalism is fated  
because of its internal contradictions and,  
becoming effete and incompetent to meet  
people's needs, must give way to a funda-  
change in the social order, namely, the  
Communism."

One feels that after all, despite the  
ing hopelessness of our workmates, our  
e is bound to succeed, and we sit back in the  
chair and wait for the doom and fall of the  
talist World.

The theory continues: "Economic conditions  
responsible for the mental outlook of the  
workers and iron laws exist, binding the evolu-  
of society to hard and fast rules of change."  
his is defined by many as Marxism, but I  
it Socialist superstition.

### The Gospel of Apathy.

hesitate to ascribe it to Marx, but it is,  
Socialist movement in of Marxists. Thus  
out doubt, the philosophy involving some of  
M. Hyndman addressing a conference  
al Democrats, a few years prior to the war:—

"Gentlemen, we may sit down, the  
apitalists are doing our work."  
ou repudiate him. Very well.

fore recently a writer in the *Spur*, stated  
"a man or woman's point of view is an  
t reflex of their income."

hat this is unsound is simple to prove, but,  
atheless, it is typical of the slipshod, rigid  
ories now prevalent.

uropean Socialism is thick with variant sec-  
s; each denies the right of the others to the  
l "Marxist." Lenin sounds the denuncia-  
of the German and French followers of Marx;  
tsky and Longuet as the betrayers of Marx;  
in their turn denounce the Bolsheviki as  
xponents of true Marxism, yet it is dis-  
tally amusing for those who are without a  
alist Deity to stand outside and watch and  
der.

### Waiting for Things to Happen.

The fact remains, tragic and true, all are  
ring from a superstition.

he conclusion that such a watcher must ulti-  
sely arrive at is, that the greatest mistake  
our time is the ever prevailing assurance of  
mmunists that great economic influences,  
sent to-day, must bring a successful social  
olution.

hat they play a part, only the foolish will  
y; but that they are a primary deciding pur-  
e, is a grave fallacy, and the predominance  
his point of view to-day retards and cripples  
work of the Communist movement.  
he greatest force in society is ideas; it is the  
oughtstuff" that shapes the world.

conomic depression, unemployment, un-  
mately, do not in practice bring a healthy  
ionary spirit, or if in a minor way  
Bong developments occur, they are but

due to stomach impulse develops  
des in accordance with the manipula-  
safety valve—reform; but revolt,

### MESSAGE to SYLVIA PANKHURST from the GERMAN WOMEN.

*At the moment when the international  
governing classes make desperate efforts,  
despite their inherent antagonism, to unite  
for the purpose of exploiting the working  
classes and for crushing the only refuge of  
the proletariat, the Soviet Russian Repub-  
lic, we German Communist women consider  
it more necessary than ever to strengthen  
the international solidarity of the  
proletariat of the whole world, separated  
only by artificially-erected frontiers, by  
sending to you, the valiant fighter for  
Communism, the expression of our deepest  
sympathy and our most cordial sisterly  
greetings.*

*We are fully convinced that the day is  
not far away when the revolutionary  
English proletariat will open the doors of  
your prison and give you back to the rank  
and file of the victorious proletariat.*

*In our present heavy struggle, we are  
conscious of the solidarity of the English  
proletariat, and we unite with them and the  
Russian proletariat for the overthrow of  
Capitalism in the whole world.*

*International fraternal greetings from  
the Women's Section of the United Com-  
munist Party of Germany.*

based upon the association of emotions with  
reason and conviction, forces the hand of the  
manipulation of safety valves, and the measure  
of ideas moulds and forces the order to change.

### Need for Head Work.

Each department of life takes certain forms:  
in trade, in pleasure, in known scientific device;  
the method of procedure represents the associa-  
tion of thought; each change is influenced by  
every previous change, and makes the thinking  
out of new changes in other departments neces-  
sary.

### GREETINGS from SOUTH AFRICA.

TO COMRADE E. SYLVIA PANKHURST,  
PRISONER IN SECOND DIVISION,  
HOLLOWAY PRISON.  
February 17th, 1921

DEAR COMRADE,

*We have viewed with pride your heroic  
struggle during the last few months against  
the forces of Capitalism, and your splendid  
sacrifices for the cause of Communism. It  
was with the deepest regret that we learnt  
that your conviction had been sustained.  
We would offer our sincere sympathy, and  
bid you be of good courage against the day  
of your deliverance.*

*With Communist Greetings,  
From the Communist Party of South  
Africa,*

C. F. GLASS, Hon. Sec.

In the working of industry, in the conduct of  
living relations, such changes are termed eco-  
nomic changes; each economic change making  
new changes necessary, does not bring those  
needed changes. Effecting change is the pur-  
pose and function of thought.

Thus a high-browed resolution passed at an  
enthusiastic Congress to the effect that "the  
hour has come for the working class to fulfil its  
historic mission," leaves me rather cold. The  
workers, unfortunately, know nothing about it  
and regard such utterances as strange.

Yes, the economic situation makes a change  
necessary, but the "thoughtstuff" is welled up  
and hindered by lies and cunning, and the  
workers, robbed of vision, are pounded to pieces  
by the great "White" weapons of a beastly  
system and its supporters.

To think of the blindness of Labour is a  
horrible matter; but a greater tragedy is to  
think of those who speak in the name of the new  
society.

### Personal Effort—Now.

Labour is losing ground. Those whom  
Shelley perceived as "the many" are retiring  
before "the few." Study the industrial situa-  
tion and see; is it because of the cowardice of  
Labour? The answer must be: No. It  
because of the lack of "thoughtstuff."

Labour does not know how to help itself. The  
Communists prefer to wait until some by-election  
and then run an anti-Parliamentary candidi-  
to Parliament, in order to tell Labour how to act.

To my mind, a great impetus would be given  
to our movement if we all devoted our time to  
talk at street corners.

The circulation of a paper and the growth of  
an organisation depend upon the responsive  
sympathy from the masses, generated by the  
soap-box orator. The extremity of Capitalism  
recoils on the heads of the workers, forcing them  
down further and further.

### Labour Movement Ear to Ground

With the whip of circumstances, the Labour  
movement shapes its policy in strict accordance  
to its ideas as a whole. The masses look to the  
leaders for a lead, the leaders look to the masses  
for a push, and so the game goes on. Finally  
the masses lose ground to the capitalists, who  
then tell them they are "becoming wise."

The advanced industrial papers look also to  
the masses and tune their tone to suit, and the  
masses, seeking to obtain a leader, are blissfully  
unconscious of their real position.

The days pass on, and the battle continues  
furiously to be waged between the classes. The  
capitalist crisis of the Marxist is at hand, yet  
Labour falters; the correct adjustment of eco-  
nomic and psychologic influences must be ob-  
tained by endless propaganda, and the cry be  
raised from all sides: "Rise from knees and  
conquer; your fears alone hinder."

### RULES FOR CONTRIBUTORS.

1. Write with ink on one side of the paper  
only, and kindly leave a wide space between the  
lines. Typewritten manuscripts should be  
double-spaced.

2. All letters and articles for publication should  
reach the Editor on the Friday before publica-  
tion. Small notices can only be inserted Monday.