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DEFANGING MARX

October 14, 2009

Dear Comrades,

* * *

I hope that all is well with you as you read this. You both have not been far from my thoughts.

I'm hoping that we (the SLP) can sustain ourselves through this batch of stormy weather. "It's always darkest before the dawn," as the old saw goes.

I've just read Peter Singer's *Marx: A Very Short Introduction* twice. Not a comprehensive tome by any means, but a good introductory text for the neophyte. I disagree with Singer's conclusion, however. Towards the end of the aforesaid work, Singer deems Marx more a "philosopher" rather than a social scientist. In my deeming, Marx was both a philosopher and social scientist.

* * *

Fraternally yours,
ROBERT JENSEN
National Member-at-Large

October 28, 2009

Robert Jensen

National Member-at-Large

Dear Comrade Jensen:

Thank you very much for your letter of October 14, . . .

* * *

I am not familiar with Peter Singer's book on Marx, though a quick check to the Internet informs me it dates from 1980. I am, however, familiar with other efforts to "defang" Marx by characterizing him as just another idle philosopher and stripping him of his revolutionary credentials. Those efforts date back to at least the 1960s and emanate primarily from academic and Social Democrat sources. Eric Fromm, among others, comes to mind. Lately they have even come out of the Roman Catholic Church, which has implicitly endorsed the views expressed in the Jesuit newspaper, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, by a professor of philosophy at a European Catholic university. The article is not available in English, as far as I know, but *The Times* of London summed it up on October 22, as follows:

"*L'Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican newspaper, said yesterday that Marx's early critiques of capitalism had highlighted the 'social alienation' felt by the 'large part of humanity' that remained excluded, even now, from economic and political decision-making. Georg Sans, a German-born professor of the history of contemporary philosophy at the pontifical Gregorian University, wrote in an article that Marx's work remained especially relevant today as mankind was seeking 'a new harmony' between its needs and the natural environment. He also said that Marx's theories may help to explain the enduring issue of income inequality within capitalist societies. 'We have to ask ourselves, with Marx, whether the forms of alienation of which he spoke have their origin in the capitalist system,' Professor Sans wrote. 'If money as such does not multiply on its own, how are we to explain the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the few?'"

But the better part of *The Times'* summary was in what followed:

"Professor Sans argues that Marx's intellectual legacy was marred by the misappropriation of his work by the communist regimes of the 20th century. 'It is no exaggeration to say that nothing has damaged the interests of Marx the philosopher more than Marxism,' he said.

"This," *The Times* went on, "overturns a century of Catholic hostility to his creed. Two years ago Benedict XVI singled out Marxism as one of the great scourges of the modern age. 'The Marxist system, where it found its way into government, not only left a sad heritage of economic and ecological destruction, but also a painful destruction of the human spirit,' he told an audience in Brazil.

APPLY AS NEEDED

November 18, 2009

Robert Bills

National Secretary

Dear Comrade Bills:

I am enclosing check for \$3,000.00. Please apply part of the amount for my membership fee through 2012. The rest apply to whatever cause, (1) *SLP Newsletter* or (2) *The People*.

Best regards to Comrade Donna and you.

Fraternally yours,

JACK RADOV

National Member-at-Large

December 2, 2009

Jack Radov

National Member-at-Large

Dear Comrade Radov:

Thank you very much for your letter of November 18, the good wishes you included for Donna and me, and most especially for the generous gift of \$3,000.00 you enclosed for the SLP.

(Continued on page 2)

"Then again the Pope has been busy reappraising modern capitalism. Benedict's latest encyclical, *Charity in Truth*, offers a direct response to the recession, arguing that global capitalism has lost its way and that Church teachings can help to restore economic health by focusing on justice for the weak and closer regulation of the market."

All of this is unmitigated nonsense, of course, and only serves to underscore the fundamentally immoral and opportunistic nature of the Roman Catholic Church. While it is certainly true that Marx's ideas were misappropriated by the "Communist" and, for that matter, Social Democratic regimes of the 20th Century, it is equally disingenuous to contend "that nothing has damaged the interests of Marx the philosopher more than Marxism," by which it is meant to suggest that the misappropriation of Marx's "philosophical" ideas somehow did not extend to the social, economic and political institutions erected by the former Soviet Union and other so-called socialist regimes.

At the same time, these contentions also comprise a clear-cut case of confession and avoidance on the part of the Church and all others who have supported the capitalist system all along. If capitalism alienates and concentrates wealth to the detriment of society as a whole, which it obviously does, then its cheerleaders and apologists, among which the Church has filled a prominent and vociferous role, share in that responsibility. What the Church would argue, of course, is that capitalism has anti-social effects only because it is not governed by Roman Catholic precepts of morality, etc., which evidently do not include bearing false witness against one's neighbor, as the Church surely has against Karl Marx.

The simple truth is that Marx cannot be divided into two separate and independent parts and that his observations on the cruel effects of capitalism—the "philosophical" half-flow from and are inextricably connected to his scientific dissection of how capitalism works. Capitalism creates "social alienation" and leads to "the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the few" precisely because it is a class-divided society in which the means of life are monopolized by a few and that the working-class majority are exploited through the wages system, exactly as Marx described in *Capital* and other works.

What all this does, of course, is reduce Marx from a scientist who got at the root of "alienation" and the concentration of wealth, etc., to a mere observer of the effects—to a "philosopher" who somehow got it right while getting it wrong, i.e., by drawing correct conclusions from false and erroneous premises.

When your enemies start to praise you, look out! When they do that, it is absolutely certain that they are up to no

good. The Singers, the Fromms (and Social Democrats generally), the "Communists"—and now the Roman Catholic Church—all "misappropriate" Marx, each for their own special reasons.

We are all familiar with Marx's observation that "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it." The anti-Marxists, i.e., those who would divide Marx against himself, have no interest in changing the world in any fundamental way. The SLP does, and defending Marx against those who would co-opt him for their own anti-revolutionary purposes is one of the most important tasks we of the SLP have to perform.

Fraternally yours,

ROBERT BILLS

National Secretary

SLP VS. 'WORLD SOCIALIST MOVEMENT'

November 28, 2009

Dear Comrade Bills:

http://www.worldsocialism.org/articles/socialist_industrial_unions.php

The above link is to a purported discussion of the Socialist Industrial Union by the "World Socialist Movement," of which the Socialist Party of Great Britain is a member. As can be seen on perusing that article, the "World Socialist Movement" is impractical, and is of no use for any re-organization of society, for it denies the need for any union-based organization of government. The article, furthermore, contains many quite foolish statements such as that no unionism is needed because soldiers and police are already "socialist" in sentiment.

It serves no purpose to keep on publishing, in the SLP Newsletter, claims by SLP members that the SPGB is closely similar to the SLP. The SLP would seem to actually be more similar in general outlook to the IWW and Technocracy, Inc., than to the SPGB or any other constituents of the "World Socialist Movement"; if those two organizations (IWW and Technocracy, Inc.) would just admit to the need for a political party in addition to the Industrial Unionism, it might be possible to discuss setting up some formal affiliation with them—but neither has been consenting or admitting to this need at any time since they were founded (in 1908 and the 1930s, respectively).

Another defect of the "World Socialist Movement" is its habit of making sweeping statements of an offensive nature about subjects which do not even pertain to socialism. It was the offensive and coarse language of the lumberjacks who came to the SLP [IWW] national convention in 1908 that got them abandoned by the SLP at that time; and it is

(Continued on page 2)

EVERYTHING IS FOR SALE!

By James G. McHugh

Three articles appearing on the same page of the Nov. 15, edition of the New London, Conn., newspaper, *The Day*, reminded me of the *Communist Manifesto's* claim that capitalism has turned all relations into cash transactions.

One article described that the United States' Central Intelligence Agency has been paying "big money," actually hundreds of millions of dollars in the years since 9/11/2001, to Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Agency [ISI] for information regarding al-Qaida in Pakistan's tribal belt, which is described as the origin of every major terrorist plot in this decade. The CIA provides these funds even though it has misgivings about the honesty and loyalties of the ISI.

Another article details the sale of classroom lesson plans by thousands of schoolteachers trying to obtain funds for classroom supplies as well as personal remuneration. Lesson plans used to be given away, but now that they are being sold on the Internet some question is being raised about their ownership. "To the extent that school district resources are used," shouldn't it share in the proceeds from their sale?

Finally, a third article reveals that lobbyists for a large drug firm have supplied both Republican and Democratic lawmakers with ghostwritten statements on the health care debate. In some cases, the statements echoed each other word-for-word.

Although these revelations will many times result in a plea for greater integrity and ethical behavior from government, business and society at large, there is little or no recognition that the commercial nature of capitalism is responsible for any of them. Neither is there a sense that economic decline of the system makes its businesses, politicians and operatives behave in increasingly desperate and corrupt ways.

The U.S.'s military presence in the Middle East and central Asia is not connected to the large oil and gas reserves in that area of the world and the necessary pipeline paths to bring those minerals to world markets. Nor is this military presence connected to the phenomena of terrorism. The billion dollar commitment to these military expeditions are not connected to the oil industry's recognition of the reality of peak oil and the U.S.'s need to ensure its access to the world's remaining supplies of cheap energy sources. Oil imported to the U.S. is converted almost 100% to gasoline to power cars and other motor vehicles. Cars are as necessary as suburban sprawl and the decline of American cities and they could be vastly reduced or eliminated by Americans opting to live in more compact communities such that a short walk or bus ride would suffice for daily transportation needs. In a real sense, we are fighting a war to continue an expensive, wasteful eco-disaster. But more sensible living would result in an auto and oil business disaster and will not be endorsed under this system.

The budgetary limits of school districts is not presented as a consequence of capitalism's decline, although something was said of the current economic conditions, but this belies the reality of a long standing problem.

Finally, the third article shows lawmakers in the pocket and service of commercial interests. This is something that has been going on for quite some time; only this time exposed in a way that should be embarrassing to those involved. Judging from the article, the only regret a lawmaker expressed regarding the statements obtained from the lobbyists was that they were so similar and sometimes identical. The proposed health plan with a public option or a Medicare-for-all plan are seen as a threat to the health industry's income and profits; therefore this industry,

(Continued on page 2)

‘PREMATURE OBITUARY?’

December 6, 2009

Michael Preston

National Member-at-Large
Dear Comrade Preston:

This (belatedly, I'm afraid) is to thank you for sending me a copy of the *Socialist Standard* for October 2009. I offer the same apology I offered in explaining the delay in acknowledging receipt of the SLP Hall material you also sent to me to explain why it has taken me so long to respond to what you sent on November 11.

While I appreciate receiving a hard copy of the October issue with its "obituary" article by Adam Buick, I must tell you that I was already well aware of it and that Comrade Bortnick of the NEC has urged me to write a response. At first, I agreed that we probably should, but now I am starting to think better of it. What the SPGB thinks about the SLP is of no concern to me, and anything I might write would be meaningless if the SLP cannot pull itself together and get rolling again. Either way, it is what we of the SLP do, and not what either the SLP or SPGB says, that matters.

Time will tell if that "obituary" was premature or otherwise. The decision is ours to make, not theirs to decree.

Fraternally yours,
ROBERT BILLS
National Secretary

GOOD EXERCISE

Dear Comrade Bills,

I... want to thank Comrade Bortnick for his "Observations on the Socialist Party of Great Britain," printed in the August 2009 issue of the *SLP Newsletter*. [See our Autumn issue.]

It's fairly easy to spot reformers calling themselves "socialist" or the claptrap voices by down right ignorant liberals, but to discern then differences and "deceptive similarities" between the principles and program of the SLP and an organization such as the SPGB's takes a keener eye. It's good exercise to keep us on our Marxist-De Leonist toes.

Fraternally,
JILL CAMPBELL
National Member-at-Large

SLP HALL, BARRE, VERMONT

December 6, 2009

Michael Preston

National Member-at-Large

Dear Comrade Preston:

Thank you very much for sending me all the information about the SLP Hall in Barre, Vermont. I deeply appreciate it and apologize for not acknowledging receipt before now and expressing my appreciation. It seems I have as much work to do these days as I did when the SLP still had offices and I was "free" to put it 10 to 12 hours a day without outside interferences. I thought things were tough back then, but little did I know how tough they would become when I had to look after the "house" and the apartment building Donna and I live in while she is off earning our "daily bread."

The SLP Hall has always intrigued me and I have always wondered why those in charge never bother to invite an SLP spokesperson to speak at one of the affairs they occasionally hold, such as the one with Pete Seeger mentioned in the newsletter you sent. Indeed, it has been galling, to say the least, to read of AFL-CIO officials and former SLP members such as Paul Buhl holding forth at those events. I suppose I am partly to blame, however, because I have never had time to take the initiative or to otherwise let it be known that the old SLPer who built that hall might well be rolling over in their graves at the thought of some AFL-CIO figure "explaining" what their political views were. Perhaps I will find it possible to intercede in some way after things settle down again, though it is impossible to tell when that might be.

In any event, I am grateful for what you sent and hope this finds you feeling well and in high spirits. Thanks again.

With best wishes for the holiday season, I remain

Fraternally yours,
ROBERT BILLS
National Secretary

LETTERS TO THE PRESS

Misused Labels

SLP member-at-large Jill Campbell recently submitted a letter to the editor of the Santa Rosa, Calif. *Press Democrat*, where it appeared with several minor editorial changes in the print and online editions for November 20. The changes are indicated below by striking through Comrade Campbell's original words and underscoring those inserted in their place.

EDITOR: Lately there have appeared many letters to *The Press Democrat* and elsewhere contain references to "Marxism" and "socialism." To repeat an observation made by a reader in August, most people know nothing about Marxism.

In this limited space, one can barely begin to dispel the overwhelming misconceptions and confusion that surround Marx' discovery Marx's theory of scientific socialism (as differentiated from "utopian socialism").

Marx was a 19th century German social scientist who wouldn't recognize the nonsense that has been attributed to him in the last 160 years. Certainly he and Engels didn't envision such distortion, corruption and absolute misinterpretation of their theories as was practiced in the Soviet Union (bureaucratic despotism), for example.

Genuine Marxian socialism—a free worker-owned, controlled and operated system of exchange that produces goods and services to satisfy human need rather than for sale and profit—has never existed.

Capitalism, the once progressive successor to feudalism, is an outmoded economic dictatorship that has run its course. Its insatiable nature has brought it to the point where 1 percent of the population owns 99 percent of the wealth produced by workers who receive back in wages only a small fraction of the fruits of their labor (if they have a job at all).

JILL CAMPBELL

Clear up confusion about socialism

The following letter from SLP supporter Donald F. Cuddihee, Sr., appeared in the print and online editions of *The Greenville News* of Greenville, N.C., for November 22.

There has been much concern and confusion among readers about the definition of "socialism" and how that definition helps explain the direction of American politics.

I offer a quote from a pamphlet of the Socialist Labor Party. "What Socialism Is—and Is Not. Socialism does not mean government or state ownership. It does not mean a closed party-run system without democratic rights. Those things are the very opposite of socialism."

"Socialism," as the American Socialist Daniel De Leon defined it, "is that social system under which the necessities of production are owned, controlled and administered by the people, for the people, and under which, accordingly, the cause of political and economic despotism having been abolished, class rule is at end. That is socialism, nothing short of that." And, we might add, nothing more than that!

America remains true blue capitalistic as it throws our money and favors to multinational corporations including industry and finance. Our political system has two major factions and some lesser factions all financed and hence influenced by major corporations and powerful individuals. It has been named "Party 1." It supports the practice of market economy, competitive devouring based on self interest and unbridled growth. It is a powerful force and uses its vast economic resources to block political competition. It is not the democracy we have been taught.

An alternative, "Party 2," is called for, the locus of our hopes to protect human beings and nature and build a neighborhood economy.

DONALD F. CUDDIHEE, SR.

The Nature of Soviet Society

SLP member-at-large Bernard Bortnick submitted the following to the *Socialist Standard* on November 30. The SLP pamphlet alluded to is *The Nature of Soviet Society*.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I read with interest Adam Buick's commentary on the socio-economic system that evolved in the former USSR in the current issue of *The Standard*. Absent was the discussion developed by the Socialist Labor Party of America that for me offers the clearest explanation (albeit of a muddled situation) of what happened, taking into account the Trotskyism, Maoist (not mentioned in Mr. Buick's commentary), and that of vanguardist apologensia [apologentsia?]. The SLP study rejects the "state capitalist" appalachian [appellation?] and concludes that the most accurate description is "bureaucratic state despotism."

As the pamphlet concludes:

"The mode of production Marx analyzed has a different mode of formation, different laws of operation and a different structure than the one in the Soviet Union. The effort to describe the USSR in terms of capitalist seems to be a substitute for making the same kind of thorough analysis of this new mode of production that Marx made of the dominant one of his day." (page 46)

This commentary can be found online where the entire pamphlet can be read or downloaded.

Sincerely yours,
BERNARD BORTNICK

SLP VS. 'WSM'

(Continued from page 1)

largely the crude language of the "World Socialist Movement" that makes it impractical to deal with.

Fraternally yours,
FRANK M. RICHARDS
National Member-at-Large

December 3, 2009

Frank M. Richards

National Member-at-Large
Dear Comrade Richards:

Thank you very much for your email of November 28 and what you had to say about the interest one SLP member has expressed in exploring a possible connection with the Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB) and its "World Socialist Movement."

I am very familiar with the SPGB's statement on Socialist Industrial Unionism—and with most other SPGB statements on unionism in general—but I cannot be sure how familiar other Party members might be with those statements.

I entirely agree with you that the SLP and SPGB have virtually nothing in common. The SPGB's view of socialism and how to achieve it are completely at odds with those of the SLP. The SPGB is similar to the "Socialist" Party here in the United States, in that both are "pure-and-simple" political parties. While the SPGB differs from the SP, in that the former professes to deplore reformism while the latter embraces it, neither have any clear concept of what socialism is or how to organize to establish it, and, once established, how it will operate. It is not enough to say that their idea of socialism is a "democratic society" that differs entirely from the Soviet model; it is also necessary to have some concept of how that democracy will be organized and conduct itself.

Although the SPGB also professes a rejection of the political state, and occasionally dings Daniel De Leon for sometimes having used the phrase "industrial state," it should be obvious that its call for workers to assume control of the state without having a substitute such as the SIU in place, i.e., for leaving the question of how the working class must organize to defend itself from counter-revolutionary efforts or a misuse of state power once in "socialist" hands, is an

insurmountable flaw.

While it may be true that the IWW has more similarities to the SLP than the SPGB, National Office efforts to stimulate an in-depth discussion of that organization several years ago came to nothing. That's too bad, not because I held out any hope of developing an argument that might swing the IWW over to the SLP point of view, but because it would have helped to clarify our own position in this high-tech age of massive worker displacement, the "globalization" of modern industry and the consequential creation of a global wage-laboring working class.

As for the Technocrats, theirs has always been an elitist outlook that, as Wikipedia quite accurately describes it, would place "engineers, scientists, and other technical experts...in control of decision making in their respective fields." That is a far cry from the industrial democracy that the SLP is striving after.

Nonetheless, all these movements, organizations and groups are made up of people, and where there are thoughtful and concerned people striving for a better future for humankind there is, or should be, room for dialogue. And while the SLP staked out its position in relation to the other groups and causes long, long ago, keeping our knowledge of them up-to-date so as to recognize the points where we continue to diverge or where and how our developing views may uncover points where we start to converge is a worthy effort.

With best wishes for the holiday season and the coming New Year, I remain

Fraternally yours,
ROBERT BILLS
National Secretary

EVERYTHING...

(Continued from page 1)

according to other media reports, is waging a \$1.4 million a day war on the proposal. The large sum reveals the stake that the health industry has in the status quo. It means that health care reform would be a business disaster and most likely, will not be achieved under capitalism.

APPLY AS NEEDED

(Continued from page 1)

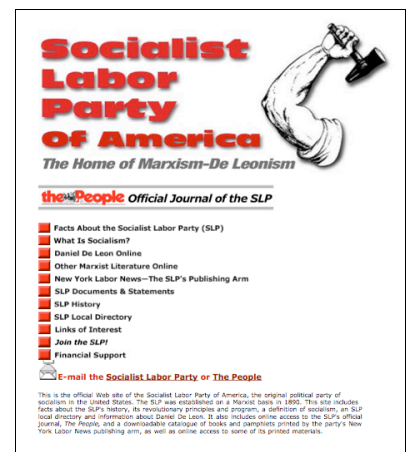
I realize not all of that was meant as a donation, that some was for dues and your mileage assessment. Nonetheless, as shown by the attached receipt, the balance of \$2,912.00 is still a splendid testament to your continued devotion to the SLP and its cause. For that I cannot thank you enough. Things are hard for the SLP at present, but if every Party member and supporter stepped forward in the same spirit and with the same generosity, I know we would soon be back on our feet again.

Incidentally, I apologize for not acknowledging receipt of your letter, etc., before now, but Donna and I were out of town for several days to visit family for the Thanksgiving holiday. I hope you enjoyed yours as much as we enjoyed ours.

Again, I thank you very much, and I wish you and yours a happy holiday season and a wonderful New Year.

Fraternally yours,
ROBERT BILLS
National Secretary

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WWW.SLP.ORG