

# Revolutionary Research

THE NEW MASSES will shortly publish reviews of two of the most important books issued in recent years. But since these books are already before the public, we take this occasion to call the reader's attention to them.

The first of these is *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization?* by Sidney and Beatrice Webb. In a brilliant analysis of this masterpiece, R. Palme Dutt has called it "a political event." This is a sober statement of fact. Not only is the book itself monumental in scope, accuracy and authority, but it gains added significance when considered in its historical focus.

Few authors have brought to a study of the first socialist state the insight and experience of the Webbs. That experience is all the more striking because it was based within the labor movement on a struggle *against* Communism.

Fifty years ago, Sidney Webb began his political career in the newly-formed Fabian Society, whose leading spirit he remained for decades. Fabianism was the earliest clearly-formulated alternative in the labor movement to Marxism. Through the late Edouard Bernstein, who sat at the Webbs' feet in London, Fabianism later spread through Europe as Revisionism.

The Fabians boasted that their first achievement was "to break the spell of Marxism in England." Representing the most progressive wing of the bourgeoisie, they countered the revolutionary policy of class-struggle with an attempt to guide the working class along the path of peaceful reform within the existing capitalist structure.

The Fabians, headed by the Webbs, were self-confident until the World War gave them their first great shock. They then discovered their own failure "to think internationally." Doubts of reformism cropped up here and there in the *Decay of Capitalist Civilization*, published by the Webbs in 1923. The great general strike of 1926—which Palme Dutt characterizes as the "first clear pointer of the future British revolution"—dealt another blow to Fabian illusions.

Moreover, the Fabian thinker participated in the two minority Labor

governments headed by Ramsay MacDonald in 1924 and 1929. Sidney Webb became Lord Passfield; yet his voluminous writings are silent on his experiences in the Labor governments. Always scrupulously honest, Webb must have grasped the lessons of his experience as a minister of the crown. The Labor governments could make no advance toward basic social change; they could not halt the development of the capitalist crisis, which involved the Labor government in political disgrace and the Labor Party in a heavy electoral disaster. Reformism was obviously a failure as a line for the working-class to follow; and it is at about this time that the Webbs turned to their persistent study of the first socialist republic, which culminated in *Soviet Communism*.

They approached this study with all the typical anti-Soviet prejudices of the Second International; they emerged from it convinced that the Soviet Union is on the right path. Pointing to the "unrivalled scientific authority of the Webbs as trained and responsible investigators," Palme Dutt puts his finger on the essential significance of their monumental study:

It is not that their conclusions, taken in their most general character, are new in principle to those already acquainted with the outlook of Communism and with the realities of the Soviet order, as these have been developing for nearly two decades. For these it may rather be noted that in the exhaustive range of this survey over every field, no one, even the most expert, can fail to learn much that is new in detail and of the highest value. But what is new for the widest public is that these conclusions, these general principles, characteristics, aims and life of Soviet democracy are here set out and inescapably proved for the first time, not as subjective impressions or theoretical principles, but on the basis of a full survey of objective facts, with such a wealth of completeness, living detail and illustrative example, meeting and dispelling in the broad sweep of the argument all the thousand-and-one idle skepticisms, criticisms and misconceptions which still commonly block the view, that it is impossible for any impartial reader after a careful reading, to fail to be fully convinced of the essential truth of this living picture of a new and higher form of democracy in being.

The Webbs are outstanding investigators on a continent which has carried revolutionary social research to a high point. It is gratifying to find that at this moment, America, too, is making significant contributions to this field. The remarkable work in report, pamphlet and book which the Labor Research Association has been carrying on for some years is now crowned by Anna Rochester's *Rulers of America*, the first thorough analysis of finance capital in the United States done by the Marxist method.

It so happens that Anna Rochester is a Daughter of the American Revolution, a direct descendant of the man who founded Rochester, New York. But her logical mind drew a direct line from the love of freedom and the revolutionary spirit of her colonial forebears to the revolutionary struggle of the modern proletariat for a classless society. She became involved early in progressive movements and by 1910 was an active member of the Socialist Party. Her whole experience in liberal and labor movements and finally a trip around the world, when she had an opportunity to observe imperialism in the Far East directly, convinced her completely that "the teachings of Marx, as developed for the imperialist era by Lenin, offered the only scientific solutions for the multiplying social and economic contradictions of capitalism."

During her seven years' work with the Labor Research Association, Anna Rochester has written a number of pamphlets and a book called *Labor and Coal*. Her new volume, *Rulers of America*, is the result of four years' intensive study and marks the highest point reached so far in American revolutionary research in this field. The new work, exhaustive and integrated, not only describes the rulers of America but illuminates the economic foundations on which the entire life of the American people rests. It should be read by everybody who really wishes to understand our country; and if it is read in conjunction with the Webbs' survey of the Soviet Union, and Earl Browder's *What Is Communism?*, the reader will have the unique and profitable experience of seeing two worlds stand out in luminous contrast.

# Shall We Be Duped by Hitler?

JOHN STRACHEY

LONDON, March 9.

**T**HE overwhelming question which faces every decent man and woman in Britain and America today is this: are we to become the dupes of Hitler? Hitler's latest and most desperate gamble has put a heavy responsibility upon everyone who understands the elements of the international situation. I do not know what the reaction of liberal and radical opinion in America has been. But in Britain the danger that a large section of this opinion will become Hitler's best supporters is acute.

For example, every member of the British labor movement who has any understanding of the international situation has been staggered and appalled by The Daily Herald's treatment of Hitler's speech and occupation of the demilitarized zone. Both in a leading article and in a long statement by The Daily Herald's diplomatic correspondent, Norman Ewer, The Daily Herald took up the view that the British government should refuse to support France in taking any measures against Germany's breach of the Locarno treaty and should on the contrary accept Hitler's offers for pacts of non-aggression with his western and with some of his eastern neighbors. Ewer strongly advocated that the British labor movement should urge this view on the government. He ended his message as follows:

While not condoning treaty breaking, labor is likely to take the line that there is now an opportunity for a fresh start and a new chance for a real and equitable settlement of the problems created by the blunders of Versailles. . . . And it will certainly urge that no such opportunity should be thrown away and that British policy must be decided in London, not dictated from Paris.

I do not think that it is too much to say that should the British labor movement take up such an attitude, it will betray the cause of peace and the world-wide interests of the working class.

Let us take first the question of Hitler's offers. There is one simple test to apply to them. Will he make them universal? If he will conclude pacts of non-aggression for twenty-five years, with the Soviet Union as well as with France, Britain and the smaller states which border Germany on both east and west, then of course his offer in itself is acceptable. Indeed, both France and the Soviet Union have continually urged him to do just this. It is the same with his offer to return to the League and to negotiate a new Locarno treaty. Of course, no one is going to prevent Germany from signing every kind of peace pact so long as one state and that the state upon which the hopes of the whole working class and, indeed

of every decent man and woman in the world, are centered—namely, the Soviet Union—is not left out.

But Hitler's proposal is precisely to leave out the Soviet Union, to conclude peace pacts with everyone else but her. One does not even have to read his speech with its hysterical denunciations of Socialism and of everything for which we of the labor movement stand, to know what is his purpose. It is of course to secure a free hand to isolate, to attack and if he can to destroy the Soviet Union. Nothing more and nothing less than that is the purpose of everything Hitler has done and everything he has said during his whole career. It has never been difficult to deduce this fact, for he has been very frank. But this latest outbreak is the clearest of all. Its simple purpose is to secure his rear defenses by fortifying the Rhine and by making agreements with the western capitalists while he launches the entire force of Germany upon Leningrad, Kiev and Moscow.

To advocate an acceptance of Hitler's offer without insisting that it is made universal by the inclusion of the Soviet Union is wittingly or unwittingly to betray everything for which the working-class movement of the world has ever stood.

Yet horrible as it is to have to record it, neither in The Daily Herald nor in a dreadful statement which Mr. Lansbury has issued nor in the comments of liberal newspapers, such as the News Chronicle, is there one word about this condition.

Such an omission would be inconceivable if it had not happened. How it can have happened I do not pretend to know. Are these spokesmen of British labor at heart enemies of socialism and of all that the Soviet Union stands for? Or is it simply that they never think at all? In any case, the betrayal and isolation of the Soviet Union by the workers of the rest of the world would be the effect of that "fresh start" and "new chance" for which Mr. Norman Ewer pleads.

This is what an acceptance of Hitler's present offers would do. We can only trust that there are enough men and women in the British labor movement who understand the very elements of the world-wide struggle that is going on before our eyes today to prevent this appalling disaster.

Of course, Hitler's offers cannot be accepted, for neither the French capitalists nor the French workers can possibly accept them. Forced by their geographical position to stay nearer to reality, the French know that if they abandon to Hitler not only the Soviet Union but Czechoslovakia and their other allies to the east, their own fate is sealed.

Hitler knows this as well as anyone. Hence the single object of his elaborate offers is to affect British public opinion. That and nothing else is why they have been made.

What, then, is the alternative? The Daily Herald, in a grossly misleading article, tells us that if we do not surrender abjectly to the mailed fist of Hitler, excuse every one of his aggressions and accept every one of his offers, the result must be immediate war.

This is utterly untrue. France is not asking us to march into the Rhine. She is asking us to do precisely what we and, above all, the British labor movement has been urging upon her for the last six months: that is to say, to apply sanctions to the aggressor. Both Mr. Ewer and the writer of the Herald's leading article spend their greatest efforts in proclaiming that sanctions are out of the question. But why are sanctions out of the question? On the contrary, if sanctions were right for the small aggressor, Italy, they are right for the great aggressor, Nazi Germany. Nor do sanctions mean war. Hitler is not ready and never will be ready to wage simultaneous war against France, Russia and Great Britain plus all the smaller powers of Europe. As a matter of fact, his financial and economic situation is extremely weak. In the opinion of every single person who knows, this is the reason why he has sprung his present coup. Hence economic and financial sanctions, which are all that France is demanding, can certainly bring him to terms.

One well informed Berlin correspondent of The London Times states the position very clearly:

The whole performance was a bold bid by the Fuehrer to cut his way out of the difficulties which beset the regime as a result of its internal division and which are accentuated now by the growing financial difficulties. Should he succeed, Herr Hitler will have finally reestablished his leadership and have freedom of action in internal affairs he does not now possess. Whether he succeeds or not depends largely on whether English public opinion reacts to the adventure in the way he and his advisers hope it will.

This, then, is the issue. Hitler is gambling on the support of the pro-fascist forces in the British government plus the incorrigible ignorance, sentimentality and folly of many of the leaders of opinion within the British liberal and working-class movement. He calculates that these two forces together will prevent the British government from backing France in applying sanctions to him. Should he succeed, he will have won his way at last to a free hand for attack upon the Soviets.

But it is a desperate gamble. He knows perfectly well that he cannot for a moment stand up to the united forces of France, Britain and the rest of the world. He must