

STUDENT SOCIALIST

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STUDENT-YOUTH SECTION of LABOR ACTION

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A Reply to Kimmel's Whitewash of Stalinland in the 'Maroon' —

To Russia: with Both Eyes Shut

Alan Kimmel's report on his trip to Eastern Europe is, to put it mildly, a very surprising piece of work. In a series of five articles written by a former editor of the *Chicago Maroon* one would expect some considered analysis and some real grappling with the issues involved. Instead Kimmel's articles are so naive that it is hard to believe they were written by a University of Chicago student.

Kimmel attended the Third World Festival of Youth and Students for Peace in Berlin last August. This rally was supposedly devoted to the cause of world peace. If this were really its purpose one would think that it would have contributed something to Kimmel's understanding of the problem of building a permanent peace. Whether Kimmel or the peace conference is at fault is hard to say but this expectation is certainly not fulfilled.

He says, "Each participant could see that if we could find such friendship and brotherhood in Berlin for two weeks we could do the same in the whole world and establish the basis for a lasting peace." Such an idea can certainly not be based on a thoroughgoing analysis of the contemporary world situation. Any attempt to get at the basis of the problem of peace is completely lacking in Kimmel's articles.

But for the sake of argument, let us accept Kimmel's premise that all that is needed for a lasting peace is brotherhood and friendship. How is that brotherhood and friendship to be created? Obviously we cannot all go to Berlin for two weeks in the summertime. It is simply physically impossible for world brotherhood to be achieved through personal contact. Therefore we must accept the next best thing which is to attain the fullest possible understanding of the other peoples of the world. Kimmel had an excellent opportunity to contribute to this understanding, but failed miserably.

EMBARRASSING QUESTIONS

His discussion of what he saw in Russia is the best example of this failure. He evidently was so overpowered by his desire to be "brotherly" that he refrained from asking any questions that might embarrass the Russians and thereby weaken the ties of brotherhood that he was building up.

He thus achieved brotherhood at the price of keeping his mouth shut, and that type of brotherhood we can have with the Russians any time we want it. For socialists, brotherhood on that market is not worth the price.

Kimmel tells us that he went to Russia not as a tourist but as a "responsible reporter." He explains that he and others were able to draw up their own itinerary and see and ask what they wanted. It is therefore not unwarranted for us to expect that in justifying his belief "that peaceable coexistence between our two countries was both possible and necessary" he would discuss some of the questions whose answers would lead to that desired peace.

For students a real understanding of that "mysterious" land of Russia is a necessary starting point in building a firm and just peace. It is therefore incumbent upon a student editor visiting Russia to answer the many questions which generate distrust and hostility in American students.

Do the Russian people enjoy political democracy with its civil liberties, free press, and independent inquiry? What are the functions of the trade unions and the conditions of the Russian working masses? What is the nature of Russian education and who attends schools in Russia? What are the real conditions and standard of living of the Russian people? These are some of the questions that require answers.

Kimmel, however, prefers to touch upon one or two of these questions only tangentially and devote the remainder of the extensive space generously granted him by the editors of the *Maroon* to extolling the deep desire for peace in the hearts of the Russian people. His road to brotherhood is to accept all Stalinist claims at face value. This is easy enough for him, but the result of it is that he tells us only those things which will confirm his beliefs.

Nowhere in the two articles devoted entirely to Rus-

The article featured on this page was originally submitted to the University of Chicago newspaper, the *Maroon*, as the SYL's reply to a series of articles by Maroon ex-editor Alan Kimmel. Kimmel was ostensibly reporting on a trip to Eastern Europe and Russia; his series was mainly a paean to Stalinism and an uncritical defense of Kremlin policy.

The SYL of the University of Chicago, which supported the protest of U. of C. students against the university's undemocratic dismissal of Kimmel from his elected post as Maroon editor, believes that the views he represents can best be fought and defeated by political means, including answering his "facts" with the truth, without recourse to witchhunting or loyalty purges. It therefore submitted the accompanying article to the *Maroon*. However, the *Maroon*, which had published Kimmel's long series, was unwilling to grant more than 500 words to any reply. That is why the SYL's answer appears here.—Ed.

sia did Kimmel make one reference to the complete absence of even the most elementary forms of political democracy. He did not tell us, nor did he deny, that the Russian people have the unrestricted right to read the official Stalinist press and no other; to attend official Stalinist meetings, and no others; to echo official Stalinist opinion, and no other; to listen to official Stalinist broadcasts, and no others; to vote, whenever called upon, for the official Stalinist ticket, and no other.

Perhaps Kimmel felt that by ignoring this problem he could make us forget it. But we can no more overlook this lack of democratic rights in Stalinist Russia that we did in Hitler's Germany.

Kimmel's picture of the Russian working people is idyllic and evasive. No mention is made by him of the Russian worker's rights or his working conditions; and what is said of his living standard can easily be refuted.

All traces of the workers' rule or workers' control which existed in the early days of the Bolshevik regime have been wiped out by the Stalinist bureaucracy. The so-called "trade unions" are officially excluded from a determining voice in such matters as hiring, firing, production standards, working conditions, length of the working day and wages. The central trade-union committees are composed entirely of appointed officials (*Izvestia*, May 16, 1937). A member of the Political Committee tells us that "the wage scale must be left entirely in the hands of the heads of industry. They must establish the norms." (*Pravda*, Dec. 9, 1935.)

"The proper determination of wages and the regulation of labor demand that the industrial heads and the technical directors be immediately charged with responsibility in this matter. This is also dictated by the necessity of establishing a single authority and ensuring economy in the management of concerns . . . [The workers] must not defend themselves against their government. That is absolutely wrong. That is supplanting the administrative organs. That is left opportunistic perversion, the annihilation of individual authority and interference in the administrative department." (Weinberg in *Trud* 8, vii, 1933.)

PARALLELED ONLY BY FASCISM

It is no wonder that the unions hold no conventions and leaders are appointed by the state.

But what of the working conditions of the individual worker? The Russian worker must accept work wherever he is told to go (Decree of Oct. 11, 1930, renewed during the war) and he is not permitted to leave the factory without the permission of the employer, the boss or the director; and a violation of this regulation is punishable by up to ten years imprisonment.

Absence from work without justification can be punished by dismissal; three latenesses totaling 20 minutes per month are equal to an absence (decree of Dec. 16, 1932, reaffirmed June 26, 1940). For idling or "unsatisfactory output"—and remember who sets the norms!—a worker can be dismissed and his ration card withdrawn (decree of Dec. 29, 1939).

Needless to say, the Russian workers have not the right to strike for redress of grievances. Unauthorized quitting of the job is punishable by forced labor (decrees of June 26 and July 24, 1940).

Every Russian worker must carry a labor book. It is a criminal offense to hire a man who does not have his book and in the book are listed all fines assessed against the man, all his dismissals and the reasons thereof, all his insubordinations, etc. A compulsory home passport system is in existence which requires absence from home for more than 24 hours to be reported to the police and permission to travel must be obtained from the authorities (decree of Dec. 27, 1932, code o.1.1932, 84-516). Such laws as these find their only parallel in the recent history of fascist states.

Any Russian worker who becomes dissatisfied with his lot and decides to flee the country will be well taken care of. Flight abroad without permission is punishable by death (decree of June 26, 1934). Permission, of course,

is virtually never granted and, in view of the probable consequences, is probably seldom requested.

This drastic regulation, however, applies only to the civilian population. For the military, a more ruthless law exists. Paragraph 3 of the decree of June 8, 1934 (published in *Izvestia*, June 9, 1934, and quoted in Arthur Koestler's book, *The Yogi and the Commissar*) states:

"In the event of flight or escape abroad of a military person, the adult members of his family, if they have in any way assisted the preparations or the commitment of the act of treason, or even if they have known about it without bringing it to the knowledge of the authorities, will be punished with five or ten years of imprisonment and with confiscation of their property.

"The other adult members of the traitor's family, living with him or being his dependents at the time of treason, are deprived of their electoral rights and deported for five years to the remote regions of Siberia." [Italics ours.]

In other words, people who have no knowledge of the "crime" but are merely related to the "criminal" are held responsible.

JUSTICE ENDS AT THE BORDER

As for the actual living conditions of the Russian working class there is no evidence either from friends or critics of the Russian regime to support Kimmel's claim that wages are rising and prices going down. For a detailed analysis of this question we refer the interested reader to the recently published *Russia's Soviet Economy* by Harry Schwartz.

This book shows graphically (page 461) that, using 1928 as a base, prices have risen almost steadily in 20 years to almost 30 times what they were. Earnings in the same period have increased only slightly more than tenfold. Thus, according to Schwartz, the average Russian worker in 1948 earned only a little more than a third of the buying power he earned 20 years previously.

The absence of any statistical claims from Russia for many years now, let alone free discussion and interchange of materials on such important questions, only heightens the credibility of Schwartz's analysis. The recent price reductions in consumers' goods undoubtedly affect the figures from 1948 on (*Salisbury, N. Y. Times*, Dec. 30, '51), but even assuming the validity of these recent claims, the effect is almost negligible in face of the tremendous disparity already mentioned.

In his second article, Kimmel waxes quite indignant over the charges by the North Korean government of American atrocities against the civilian Korean population. With the wrath common only to the most righteous, he explains that "we should ask our government about them."

This, it is true, is an admirable attitude and we certainly would go along with Kimmel in his desire to see a genuine investigation of these accusations. But why is it, we ask, that Kimmel can only see one side of the coin?

Why is it that Kimmel, a supposedly honest reporter concerned with social problems, loses all concern and be-

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The U. of Chicago Chapter SOCIALIST YOUTH LEAGUE presents its Winter Forum Series

Fri., Jan. 25—8 p.m. (Admission 25 cents)

'SNOBS!—IS THERE AN OVERSUPPLY IN POPULAR CULTURE?'—a critical appraisal of the New Yorker, Luce publications, etc.

REUEL DENNEY, Assoc. Prof. Social Sciences; former ed. *Time* and *Fortune*; author of "The Lonely Crowd."

HENRY RAGO, Asst. Prof. Humanities; poet and writer.

Sun., Jan. 27—4 p.m.

'TEN YEARS OF THE SMITH ACT'

LEON DESPRES, of the ACLU; prominent Chicago attorney.

M. J. MYER, attorney for Chi. Rent Board; counsel for the Minneapolis Trotskyists.

Sun., Feb. 10—4 p.m.

'FREEDOM UNDER PLANNING'

ABBA LERNER, Prof. Economics, Roosevelt College; author of "The Economics of Control."

Sun., Feb. 17—4 p.m.

'BUREAUCRACY IN THE CIO'

KERMIT EBY, Prof. Social Sciences; former Nat'l Educ. Director, CIO.

Tues., Feb. 19—8 p.m.

'BERNARD SHAW AND THE COMEDY OF SOCIETY'

MORTON D. ZABEL, Prof. Humanities; literary critic; editor of Viking Portable "Conrad."

All meetings at East Lounge, Ida Noyes.

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Next month:

A four-page STUDENT SOCIALIST section.