

The working class and its party--the Communist-Bolshevik Party--aim not only at an economic liberation, but also at a spiritual liberation of the toiling masses. And the economic liberation itself will proceed all the more quickly, if the proletarians and day-laborers will throw out of their heads all the crazy ideas that the feudal landholders and the bourgeoisie and manufacturers have knocked into them. We have already seen how easy it was for the former governing classes to hedge in the workers on all sides with their newspapers, their magazines, handbills, their priests, as well as with their schools, which they had succeeded in transforming from an instrument of enlightenment into an instrument for obscuring the popular consciousness.

# **THE BELIEF IN GOD AND IN THE DEVIL IS A CONFUSION OF THE MIND OF THE WORKERS**

One of the instruments for the obscuring of the consciousness of the people is the belief in God and the devil, in good and evil spirits, angels, saints, etc., in short--*religion*. The masses of the people have become accustomed to believe in these things, and yet, if we approach these beliefs sensibly, and come to understand where religion comes

from, and why religion receives such warm support from the bourgeois gentlemen, we shall clearly understand that the function of religion at present is to act as a poison with which the minds of the people have been and continue to be corrupted. And then we shall also understand why the Communist Party is so resolutely opposed to religion.

# **THE WORSHIP OF THE SOULS OF THE DEAD RICH WAS THE FOUNDATION OF RELIGION**

Present-day science has pointed out that the most primitive form of religion was the worship of the souls of dead chieftains, and that this worship began at the moment that, in ancient human society, the elders of the tribe, old men more wealthy, experienced and wise than the rest of the tribe, already had secured power over the remaining members. At the very outset of human history, when men still were in the semi-ape stage, they were equal. The elders did not put in their appearance until later, and then began the subjugation of the other members. Then also the latter began to worship the former, and this worship of the souls of the dead rich is the foundation of religion; these "saints," these little gods were later transformed into a single threatening deity, who punishes and rewards, judges and regulates.

Let us see why it was that this conception of things arose among men. The fact is that man always attempts to see things little known to him in the light of those with which he is well acquainted. He measures them with the yardstick of what he knows and understands. A scholar has recorded this example: a girl who had been brought up on an estate on which poultry-raising was extensively practised, was constantly occupied with eggs; eggs were constantly dancing before her eyes; and when she was confronted with the sky full of stars, she declared that eggs were scattered all over the sky. Any number of such examples might be given. Man observed that there were those who obeyed and those who issued commands; he was constantly confronted with this picture: the elder (later the prince), surrounded by his aides, was the wisest and most experienced, the strongest, the richest, and he issued the orders; and in accordance with his instructions the others acted: in short, they obeyed him. These relations were observable at all seasons and at all hours, and gave occasion to an interpretation of all occurrences as being due to similar causes. On earth, as it were, there are those who command and those who obey. Perhaps, people thought, the whole world is so constructed? The world also has its master, a great powerful, threatening creature, on whom all depends, and who will severely punish all disobedience. Now this master over all the world is *God*. Thus the conception of God in Heaven arises at the moment when on the earth below, the formerly unified society is divided up into those who obey and those elders who lead and command the tribe.

# THE WORD "GOD" IS DERIVED FROM THE WORD "RICH"[\[1\]](#)

It is an interesting fact that all the designations for God speak eloquently of this origin of religion. What does the word "Bog" mean? It is from the same root as "bogaty" (rich). God is he who is great and strong and *rich*. How else is God glorified? As the "Lord." What is a "Lord"? A "Lord" is a master and the opposite of "slave." In fact, in the prayers we say: "We are thy slaves." God is also glorified as *"the ruler of the heavens."* All the other appellations of God point in the same direction: "conqueror," "Dominus," etc. Precisely. A "Dominus" is a person who dominates, who rules over many others, who possesses a pretty good supply of wealth. What sort of thing, therefore, is God? God, so to speak, is a really rich, powerful master, a slaveholder, one who "rules the heavens," a judge--in a word, a precise counterfeit and copy of the earthly power of the elder, later of the prince. When the Jews were ruled by their princes, who punished and tormented them in every possible way, there arose the doctrine of a God that was evil and malignant. Such is the God of the Old Testament. He is a ferocious old man who inflicts cruel punishments on his subjects.

# **EVENTS ON EARTH ARE PARALLELED IN HEAVEN**

Let us glance now at the God of the Orthodox Church. This conception was elaborated in Byzantium, which furnished the model for an autocratic regime. At the head of the state stood the autocratic monarch, surrounded by his ministers; then came the superior officeholders, further down a whole system of legalized grafters. And the Orthodox Faith is a close replica of this system. At the head was the "Lord of the Heavens." Around him his foremost saints (such as the Wonderworker Nicholas, the Mother of God--somewhat of the nature of an Empress, a woman of holy spirit), corresponding to the ministers; further down there follows a whole series of angels and saints, arranged in an order similar to that of the "chinovniks" in the autocratic state. These are the so-called "officiating angels": the cherubim, the seraphim, the angels of the third and various other degrees. The very word "chin" (degree) reminds us of "chinovnik" (office-holder, bureaucrat), and both words are from the same root. These degrees ("chins") are represented in the ikons by having them dressed more richly the higher the rank, and by having a larger halo about their heads--that is, they had more decorations and "orders," exactly as on the sinful earth beneath. In the autocratic state, the chinovnik demands "obligatory palm-grease," otherwise there is nothing doing; similarly, the saint requires his candle, otherwise his wrath is incurred, and he will refuse to transmit any prayer to his highest superior, God. In the autocratic state there are special chinovniks who, for a consideration, will undertake the special function of petitioners. And, similarly, there are special saints who

pray and "intercede in the behalf," particularly, of women. For instance, the mother of God, who is an "advocate" par excellence. And she does not do her work for nothing, to her must be built greater temples than to others; rice must be bought for her ikons, and the latter must be studded with more precious stones, etc., etc.

## **THE BELIEF IN GOD IS A BELIEF IN SLAVERY**

In short, the belief in God is *an expression of the vile conditions on earth*, is the belief in *slavery*, which is present, as it were, not only on earth, but in the whole universe besides. It is of course clear that there is no truth in these things. And it is also clear that these fairy-tales are a hindrance in the path of human progress. Humanity will not advance until it has become accustomed to seek for a phenomenon its natural explanation.

But when, instead of explanations, faith is put in God or in the saints, or in the devils and woodsprites, there is no likelihood that any useful purpose will be attained. Let us take a few examples. There are some religious people who believe that when the thunder rolls, Elijah is riding in his chariot. They, therefore, whenever they hear the roll of thunder, take off their hats and cross themselves. And as a matter of fact, the very same *electrical energy*, which is responsible for the thunder, is very well known to science, and it is with its aid that we propel our tramways, which give us the power to carry anything we like. And while the old Elijah was of no use as a means of transportation, our modern electrical Elijah is indeed a charioteer of the first order. We should have no more been enabled ever to behold

any tramways, than to see our own ears. In other words, depending on religion alone, we should have continued to wallow in *barbarism*. Another example. The war breaks out, men are destroyed by the millions, oceans of blood are shed. An explanation is sought for this. Those who do not believe in God see the how, the why and the wherefore; they recognize that the war is the work of the Czars and Presidents, of the greater bourgeoisie and the landholders; they see that the war is waged in the interests of base and covetous aims. And therefore they say to the workers of all countries: "Take arms against your oppressors, cast down capital from its seat of power!" But with the religious man the case is entirely different. He reasons thus (and gasps like a little old man as he reasons): The Lord has punished us for our sins. "Oh, Holy Father, Lord of Heaven, rightly hast Thou chastised us sinful men!" And if he is very religious and orthodox in the bargain, he will set about emphatically eating one kind of food instead of another (which he calls fasting), and beating his head on the stone flags (which is known as "prostration"), and performing a host of other follies. Similar follies are practised by the religious Hebrew, the Mohammedan Tartar, the Chinese Buddhist, in a word, by all those who believe in God. From all of which it is evident that really religious people are not fit for any kind of fighting. Religion therefore not only causes the people to remain in a state of barbarism, but fits them also for the condition of slavery. The religious man is more readily inclined to accept everything without a murmur (since everything, of course, comes from God), and to submit to the powers that be, and to suffer in patience ("for everything will be requited a hundredfold up yonder"). It is therefore not surprising that the powers in control under capitalism should consider religion an extremely useful instrument for the deceiving of the people.

# THE CHURCH WAS AN ORGANIZATION OF THE BOURGEOIS STATE

We have seen that the bourgeoisie is maintained not only by bayonets, but by the process of confusing *the minds* of its slaves. We have likewise seen, on the other hand, that the bourgeoisie poisons the consciousness of its subjects in an *organized* and planful manner. This purpose is served by a special organization, and this organization is the *Church*, the religious organization of the State. In almost all the capitalistic countries the Church is a state institution of the very same type as the police; the priest is a state official in the same sense as the hangman, the gendarme, the stoolpigeon. He receives a *state subsidy* for the venom which he circulates among the people. In fact, just there lies the great danger of the situation. If it were not for this unnatural, intrenched and powerful organization which is kept in countenance by the brigand state of the bourgeoisie, we should not stand for a single priest for a single moment. They would pass alive into immediate insolvency. But the fact is that the bourgeois State wholeheartedly places all of its means at the disposition of its church hierarchy, which in turn with ardent zeal supports the bourgeois power. Under the Czar the Russian priests not only deceived the people, but they even made use of the confessional for spying out the very thoughts that were hostile to the government: they used their "mysteries" for purposes of observation. And the government not only



supported them, but persecuted with jails, deportation and all other possible means all so-called, "defamers of the Orthodox Church."

# **WHY CHURCH AND STATE MUST BE SEPARATED**

From the above the program of the Communists with regard to Church and State is clear. *We must fight the Church, not with force, but with conviction. The Church must be separated from the State.* This means, the priests may continue to exist--but let them be supported by those who wish to purchase their poison, or who have some other interest in their continued existence. Another poison of this type is opium. Those who have smoked it behold all sorts of lovely visions, are at once transported to Paradise. But the use of opium later results in a complete undermining of the health, and the user gradually becomes a complete idiot. It is similar with religion. There are persons who like to smoke opium. But it would be criminal for the State, at its expense, i. e., at the expense of the entire population, to maintain dens for the smoking of opium and to hire special persons to minister to the needs of the frequenters of these places. We must therefore proceed with the Church as follows (in fact, *we have already done it*): we must deprive the priests, hierarchs, metropolitans, patriarchs, abbots, and all the rest of the crowd, of all support from the government; let the true believers, if they like, feed them on sturgeon and salmon, of which the holy fathers are such devoted devourers.

# RELIGION A PRIVATE MATTER

On the other hand, we must guarantee freedom of belief. There necessarily follows the rule: *Religion is a private affair*. This does not in any sense mean that we must cease our struggle against the Church by conviction. It simply means that the State must not support any church organization.

The program of the Bolshevik-Communists on this point is already carried out in Russia. The priests of all sects have been deprived of all state assistance. Of course they nearly burst with rage at this affront and roundly cursed the present power, that is, the power of the workers, and read all of the Communists out of the Church. Think of this: under the Czar they knew very well the text: "There is no power but it descends from God," as well as the injunction: "Render obedience to all the powers that be." They had no objection to sprinkling the hangman with holy water. But why did they forget these texts as soon as the workers came into power? Or is it possible that the power of God is not extended also to Communists? What is the matter? The answer is very simple: The Soviet Government is the *first* government in Russia that hit the priests in *the pocket*. And this is the most sensitive spot a priest has. The priests are now in the camp of the "oppressed bourgeoisie." They are working below ground and above against the working class. But the times are bad, and the great masses of the workers no longer fall for the bait as they used to. That is the great educative accomplishment of the revolution. It liberates from economic slavery. But it also liberates from *spiritual* slavery.

# THE SCHOOLS MUST BE AT THE DISPOSAL OF THE POOREST

There is another important question in connection with the spiritual enlightenment of the masses. This is the *school* question.

Under the domination of the bourgeoisie, the school served the cause of the rearing of the masses in the sense of an *obedience to the bourgeoisie*, rather than of real instruction. All the textbooks, all the teaching implements were permeated with the odor of slavery. Particularly the history textbooks: more lies than facts narrate the glorious deeds of the Czars and of other crowned rascals. And then: the priests played an important part in the schools. Everything worked in one direction: to prepare the child in such a manner as to make of him an obedient--not citizen, but *subject*, a slave, capable, if necessary, to kill his fellows if they should be so bold as to rise against the power of capital. The schools themselves were divided into classes, some for those of black blood, the rest for those of blue blood. The gymnasiums and universities were for those of blue blood. Here the offspring of the bourgeoisie were taught all the sciences in order that they might govern and subjugate those of black blood. For those of black blood there were the lower schools. Here the priests held more undisputed sway than elsewhere. The task of these schools, which imparted very little knowledge, but handed out an uncommon mass of priestly lies, was to prepare the people who were to suffer, to obey,

and to subordinate themselves to those of blue blood without protest. Entrance into the middle schools, and more particularly to the higher institutions of learning (universities, engineering schools, and all similar institutions) was definitely out of the question for those of the plain people. In this manner there was created a *monopoly of education*. The obtaining of a more or less decent education was possible only for the rich or for those supported by the rich. And the *intelligentsia* craftily exploited this situation in their own interest. And it is therefore plain why they were opposed to the workers in the November Revolution: they scented the danger to their privileges, their favored position, which would disappear if *all* should have instruction, if even those of black blood should have the opportunity to acquire knowledge.

# INSTRUCTION SHOULD BE UNIVERSAL AND COMPULSORY

Before anything else, it is necessary to make education *universal* and *compulsory*. Under the new organization of life, on new foundations, it will be necessary for those young in years to become accustomed to useful labor. The pupils in the schools must therefore become accustomed to various kinds of productive work. The gates of the higher institutions must be open to all. The priests must be kicked out of all the schools; if they like, let them ply their task of misguiding the young in some other place: they shall not do so in the government

schools; the schools shall be *worldly, of the world*, not of the priests. The organs of the local workers' authority shall have control over the schools, and shall not stint their energies in the matter of popular education, supplying to all the children and young men and young women all the knowledge which they need for a happy life.

At present in certain villages and provincial schools some of the more stupid teachers, with the aid of the *kulaks* (or, more correctly speaking, the *kulaks*, with the aid of these stupid teachers), are carrying on a campaign with the object of pointing out that the Bolsheviki want to destroy all learning, to abolish all education, etc., etc. But this is of course a manifest lie. The object of the Communist-Bolsheviki is quite different: they wish to free all learning from the control of capital; they wish to make all science accessible to the working masses, they wish to destroy the *monopoly* (the exclusive right) *of the wealthy in education*. That is the fact of the matter. And it is not surprising that the wealthy should be eager to retain every reed on which they lean. When every worker has command of the learning of an engineer, then the case of the capitalist and wealthy engineer becomes sad indeed: there will be many more like him, and he will have nothing in particular to boast of. Then no upsetting of the workers' plans, no sabotage on the part of the old retainers of capital will any longer be possible. That is what our respectable bourgeois friends are afraid of.

Culture for the wealthy, spiritual debasement for the poor--that is the method of capitalism. Culture for all, spiritual deliverance from the yoke of capital--that is the watchword of the party of the working class, the Communist Party.

## Footnotes

**1** In Russian this is the case. Bog (God) comes from the same root as "bogaty" (rich).

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