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Letter to Young French Workers Bound for Russia

Ida Mett

22 September 1926

In the 20 September edition of *L'Humanité*, we read that yet another delegation of young French workers is bound for Russia to see the situation with their own eyes and to reassure themselves that everything that has been written about Russia is an unadulterated lie. That Russia is on the path to capitalism, a lie; that the Communist Party's dictatorship is falling apart, a lie; that most of the 'Leninist Old Guard' has been ousted from power, a lie; all of this is supposedly a lie invented by a press that has sold out to the bourgeoisie. But if they want reassurance that this is no bourgeois invention, all that is required is that the young French workers take a conscientious translator with them, if only to afford them access to the soviet press. Only then can these workers, if they truly and genuinely do want to find out the truth about Russia and if they are not going there armed with a preconceived idea dictated by headquarters, only then will they be well placed to discover the truth. Because the bulk of Russian political émigrés have never pushed their wishes and demands to same lengths as the Russian Communist Party's opposition. Who was the first to come up with the

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watchword of winding up the 'Comintern', (Communist Party International) and the 'Profintern' (Red Trade Union International)? Who was it that asked for the Communist Party to join the "2nd International and the Amsterdam trade union international? It was a member of the Russian Communist Party, currently a member of its opposition, Medvediev. Who was it that said that the party was now representing the interests of the entire population – workers, peasants, 'nepmans' and the statist bureaucracy? It was the Bolshevik Ossorsky. Wasn't it Zinoviev who exclaimed at the 14th party congress: "You now regard anyone who talks about socialism as a counter-revolutionary." And didn't Dzerzhinski state in his recent address, referring to the Old Bolsheviks, most of whom are in the opposition: "Had I had wind in time of your clandestine gathering in the forest, I'd have sent two GPU (Cheka) battalions in with machine-guns to wipe you out!" None of that was a bourgeois invention. It was recorded in the soviet press. And now it is not "counter-revolutionaries", but the Bolshevik leaders, leaders who only recently were all-powerful and acknowledged by all, who are being persecuted.

Let us take a quick look at the means whereby a young worker delegation might discover the truth (supposing that it is not going to be made up of communists who, as a matter of discipline, would be required to sing the praises of whoever might be master of the situation at any given moment). The delegation will be required to learn the truth from the lips of those who are in power, as the opposition has been side-lined and persecuted and is no more. Then again, do you take the Bolsheviks for such fool as to let inexperienced young workers look behind the scenes? That would be too naïve. It reminds me of tsarist times when a soldier seeking to make a complaint about his officer was required to submit that complaint to that very same officer ...

The delegation, like its predecessors, wishes to find out about working conditions in Russia. But let the honest souls among you young delegates ask how they might go about finding out the

truth where the worker is persecuted and dare not speak his mind. If such celebrated leaders as Trotsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev are ousted from power for having spoken their minds, how can you expect to learn the truth from the mouth of a mere weary worker, who you will in any event not be able to understand, since you have no knowledge of his language? Perhaps, if you manage to slip surreptitiously into the home of a Russian worker and provided that he can be certain that you are not a Bolshevik agent, perhaps then you might discover the truth about his harsh existence as a victim of exploitation, as long as you can understand his language.

You should therefore acknowledge that mere sight of the country is not enough; one needs to be able to understand it. Tell me honestly: is that feasible for you? ... Or are you perhaps going to believe everything your Bolshevik guides will tell you? But they tell you same thing here in France.

We learn too the reassuring news that you wish to take an interest in the imprisoned anarchists and even set foot inside the “polit-isolators” That would be laughable, were it not so tragic. Don’t you understand that they are not going to let you get anywhere near the GPU or the polit-isolators (prisons)? Don’t you realize that your questions regarding the imprisoned anarchists will draw the response: “They’re not ideal-driven anarchists, they’re bandits?” French barristers highly versed in legal practice have returned from Russia and announced that it is utterly impossible to discover and find out anything at all where the GPU is involved.

And you are out to discover the truth ... but what assurances have you, what have you been told, that they are not going to confront you with Chekists in disguise rather than imprisoned anarchists, and so on?

If you genuinely want to learn the truth about life in hard-working, exploited labour in Russia, ask the Bolshevik government about the chances of your bringing with you a Russian anarchist émigré, complete with a temporary safe-conduct pass. Then you might dis-

cover the true conditions of worker and peasant life. Then you will discover where and why the Russian anarchists and revolutionaries are being persecuted.

In the absence of that opportunity and guarantee, your delegations are pointless. They are merely proof of your naiveté and lack of political consciousness and the impossibility of your knowingly finding your bearings in the midst of your surroundings ... And that is the greatest danger to the proletarian cause.