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Attack Is The Best Form Of Defense

Johann Most

1884

Since we believe that the propaganda of action is of use, we must be prepared to accept whatever attendant circumstances it involves.

Everyone now knows, from experience, that the more highly placed the one shot or blown up, and the more perfectly executed the attempt, the greater the propagandistic effect.

The basic preconditions of success are methodical preparation, deception of the enemy in question and the overcoming of any obstacles that stand between the one who is to carry out the deed and the enemy.

The expense incurred by such undertakings is, as a rule, quite considerable. Indeed, one could go so far as to say that the possibility of such an action succeeding usually depends on whether the financial means are available to overcome the difficulties. Nowadays, money opens a number of doors one could not break open with an iron bar. The persuasive clinking of coins turns men blind and dumb. The power of the bank account overrules any ukase.

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A man who has no money cannot so much as set foot in “high society” without making himself “suspicious,” without being put under surveillance and either summarily arrested or at the least prevented in some way from carrying out his revolutionary intent. By contrast, by making himself appear elegant and “distinguished,” the same man may circulate freely and inconspicuously and will even possibly deal the decisive blow, or set in motion some engine of hell concealed beforehand in some good hiding place.

If, then, some comrades are inspired by ideas such as these, if they come to a decision to risk their lives to perform a revolutionary action, and if — realizing that the workers’ contributions are but a drop in the ocean — they confiscate the means wherewith to carry out the deed, in our opinion their actions are entirely correct and in no way abnormal.

We are, in fact, firmly convinced that there is no possibility of any noteworthy operations being carried out at all unless the necessary funds have been confiscated in advance from the enemy camp.

Hence, anyone who, while approving an operation against some representative of the modern “order of thieves,” at the same time turns up his nose at the manner in which the funds for it are acquired, is guilty of the grossest inconsistency. No one who considers the deed itself to be right can take offense at the manner in which the funds for it are acquired, for he would be like a man rejoicing in his existence who curses his birth. So let us hear no more of this idiotic talk of “moral indignation” at “robbery” and “theft”; from the mouths of the socialists, this sort of blathering is really the most stupid nonsense imaginable. Since year in and year out the working people are robbed of everything bar the absolute bare necessities of life, he who wishes to undertake some action in the interests of the proletariat against its enemies is obliged to mix with the privileged robbers and thieves in order to confiscate at least as much as he is able of what has been created by workers, and use it for

the correct purposes. In such cases, it is not theft and robbery we are dealing with, but precisely the opposite.

Those, therefore, who condemn financing-operations of the kind we have been discussing, are also against individual revolutionary acts; those who abhor such acts are totally unserious, are deceiving themselves when they call themselves revolutionaries, are unnerving the most active and dedicated pioneers of the proletariat, are playing the whore with the workers’ movement, and are, when seen in a clear light, nothing better than treacherous blackguards.

Furthermore, any “illegal” action — whether it is only an action preparatory to some directly revolutionary action or not — may easily precipitate unforeseen circumstances which of their nature only ever present themselves in the middle of a critical situation.

It follows from our argument so far that these secondary circumstances (chance occurrences) cannot be separated off from the action itself and judged according to special criteria.

For example, if a revolutionary, in the process of carrying out an act of vengeance or similar, or of confiscating the means for such an act (money, weapons, poison, explosives, etc.), suddenly finds someone obstructing him, and if this puts the revolutionary in the gravest danger, then he not only has the right, from the usual standpoint of self-defense and self-preservation, to destroy whoever it is that has betrayed him by his intervention — for this person’s arrival may send him to prison or the gallows — but he even has a duty, for the sake of the cause for which he is fighting, to brush the unexpected obstacle out of his path.