

The Working Class and Neo-Malthusianism

By V. I. LENIN

The Communist, May 1936

(Translated by A. Markoff)

[We are publishing an article by Lenin, hitherto untranslated into English,* entitled, "The Working Class and Neo-Malthusianism". This article, written on June 29, 1913, states concisely, yet definitively the position of Bolshevism on the question of Birth Control. The Leninist position on this question, as herein presented, should serve as a guide to our movement in the United States and as an effective ideological weapon against bourgeois and petty-bourgeois propaganda on this question as well as against all distortions of the Leninist teaching on Neo-Malthusianism. – EDITOR.]

At the Pyrogov Medical Congress, a good deal of interest and the major part of the discussion was devoted to the question of abortion, that is, inducing miscarriage through artificial means.

Mr. Lichkuss, in his report, brought forth data showing that there is an extremely strong and widespread practice of abortions in the modern, so-called cultural, states.

In New York, during one year, 80,000 abortions were performed; in France, abortions took place at the rate of about 36,000 per month; in St. Petersburg, the percentage of abortions more than doubled within the last five years.

The Pyrogov Medical Congress adopted a decision that criminal persecution of a mother who underwent an abortion should have no place in society and physicians should be punished only if it is found that the abortion was performed in the interests of mercenary gain. In the discussion, the majority having expressed themselves as averse to punitive measures against abortion, naturally linked up the discussion with the question of so-called Neo-Malthusianism (artificial means of preventing conception), discussing at the same time the social character of the problem. For example, Mr. Vikdorichik, according to the report of the newspaper [*Russkoe Slovo*, ("Russian word" – trans.)] declared that: "We should welcome measures for the prevention of conception"; and Mr. Astrakhan made the following statement, which was received

* Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. XVI, p. 497, Russian edition.

with tremendous applause by the audience: “We must convince mothers to give birth to children in order to have them crippled in the educational institutions, in order to turn them into cannon fodder, in order to lead them to suicide!”

If the report is true that such declaiming on the part of Mr. Astrakhan received tremendous applause, it does not surprise me. The audience consisted mainly of middle class and petty-bourgeois elements possessing a petty-bourgeois psychology. What else can we expect from them except the most vulgar type of liberalism?

But from the standpoint of the working class, it is hardly possible to find a more graphic expression of the entire reactionary character and all the pitiableness of “social Neo-Malthusianism” than the above-cited phrase of Mr. Astrakhan, “to give birth to children for the purpose of crippling them”. Only for this? Why not bring children into the world who will carry on a better, more harmonious, more vigorous, more conscious, and more determined struggle than ours against the contemporary conditions of life which cripple and destroy our generation? It is precisely in this that we find a radical difference between the psychology of a peasant, artisan, intellectual, and petty bourgeois in general and the psychology of the proletariat. The petty bourgeois sees and feels that he is heading for destruction, that life is becoming more difficult, the struggle for existence more merciless, that his own position and the position *of* his family are becoming more and more helpless. This is an incontrovertible fact, and the petty bourgeois protests against it. But *how* does he protest? He protests in the manner of a representative of a class which is hopelessly perishing, which despairs as to the future, a class which is downtrodden and cowardly. “There is nothing we can do; at least, we should have fewer children who suffer on account of our misery and drudgery, on account of our poverty and degradation.” This is the cry of the petty bourgeois.

The class-conscious worker is far removed from this point of view. He will not permit to becloud his consciousness with such wailing, no matter how sincere and how touching it is. Yes, we workers and the mass of petty owners, we all carry a life of unbearable burdens and suffering. It is much more difficult for our generation than for our fathers; but in one sense we are more fortunate than our fathers. *We have learned and are learning fast how to fight*; not to fight singly, as the best of our fathers used to do, not in the name of slogans of the petty-bourgeois rhetoricians which are foreign to us, but in the name of our

own slogans, the slogans of our class. We fight better than our fathers did; our children will fight still better, and *they will conquer*.

The working class does not perish. It is growing; it is consolidating its forces; it is becoming stronger, more courageous; it is being trained and steeled in the struggle. We are pessimists with regard to serfdom, capitalism, and small-scale production; but we are ardent optimists with regard to the labor movement and its aims. We are already laying the foundation for a new edifice, and our children will complete its structure. It is for this reason, and for this reason only, that we are unconditional foes of all Neo-Malthusianism, the course for the petty-bourgeois couple who are hardened and engulfed in themselves and who whisper in fright, "We, ourselves, thank God, could get along somehow, but as for children, better not to have them".

It is understood that our position on this question does not at all prevent us from demanding unconditional repeal of all laws that prohibit abortions or the dissemination of medical knowledge and advice about measures for the prevention of conception, etc. Such laws show up the hypocrisy of the ruling class. These laws do not cure the sores of capitalism, but transform them into especially malignant, especially burdensome sores for the oppressed masses.

Freedom of medical propaganda and the safeguarding of the elementary democratic rights of the citizens is one thing; the social teaching of Neo-Malthusianism is another thing. Class-conscious workers will always carry on a most merciless struggle against any attempt to fasten this reactionary, cowardly teaching on the most advanced, the strongest class of modern society, the class that is ready for the great task of bringing about the transformation of contemporary society.