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Bringing long peace to Cornland, Alp and Sea?

American populism is consistent with and can become a force for world-socialism. It can also be deflected by the enemies of the masses into something exactly opposite. It cannot develop socialism out of itself. Intellectually and spiritually it needs the Marxist analysis of social forces to complete it; just as, politically, the farmer-class needs the organized workers to lead it. Populism can behold its task and its future clearly only within the mirror of the revolutionary Marxist understanding of capitalist contradictions. It must augment its good will and its instinctive grasp of the desires and requirements of the great masses of the people with disciplined intellectual research.

In poetry, the fusion of social accuracy with social impulse would open up new perspectives. It would rid poetry of the reactionary backwash which Whitman so detested in his own day. Had it been evident in America twenty years ago it would have given direction to Lindsay, and would have saved such high peaks of his poetry as the *Abraham Lincoln*, *Factory Windows Are Always Broken*, *Here's To The Mice*, from drowning in isolation within a froth of false legend and guitar-trifles.

Vignettes from China

AGNES SMEDLEY

A MAN passed along the Shanghai streets today, and by chance he was a Japanese. This was chance only, but what transpired was symbolic. For he threw away a cigarette stub and two ricksha coolies saw it and rushed forward to get it. Their long, heavily-veined scrawny hands reached toward the street at the same time. They struck at each other. Then they fell to fighting, and they fought like dogs. They fought for a cigarette stub thrown away by a Japanese. Of course, it was but a chance that the passer-by was Japanese, but this lent intensity to this degraded scene.

On this same day, in another part of the city, this happened: A young ricksha coolie, perhaps blinded by the fearful beat, stumbled and fell, and was struck by a passing tram car. It seems he was killed instantly, for he lay motionless, his face upturned to the sky. The shafts of his ricksha were crushed under the wheels of the tram.

These shafts worried a Japanese policeman who walked over and, without touching the ricksha coolie to see if he were dead or alive, began removing the broken shafts from under the car. After successfully removing the broken wood from the track, the Jap-

anese policeman turned to the prostrate ricksha coolie, grasped him by a leg, and dragged him over to the curb, motioning to the tram that all was well. The car proceeded and the perspiring Japanese stood looking after it. Not once had he bent down to feel the pulse or the heart of the man at his feet, to see if he were alive or dead. It was the tram car and the profit it brings to its owners, that was important.

The prone ricksha coolie was young and strong, a lad of some nineteen or twenty summers. Perhaps he was a peasant from the country, recently come to Shanghai. For youth and strength were still on his body and it seemed that tuberculosis or heart sickness had not yet decimated him. Perhaps he came down from near Soochow where the hungry peasants have again revolted against the high taxes and the looting of the landlords—and where the Nanking Government has sent troops to force them to pay or to die. Many of these peasants have come to Shanghai as ricksha coolies, stevedores, or have become beggars. Now this lad is dead, and a policeman did not even consider it worth while to bend down and see if his heart has ceased to beat.

Today this happened in Shanghai:

Two motor vehicles rolled along a street. The front one was a Japanese truck, with two Japanese marines standing in the back. The truck drove slowly and impeded the progress of a private car in the rear in which sat a foreign white man and a Chinese chauffeur.

Irritated by the slow pace, the foreigner in the private car bent forward and said to his Chinese chauffeur: "Drive around and go home."

The chauffeur answered: "That's a Japanese truck."

"Well, what if it is?"

"I can't pass a Japanese truck."

"Why not?"

"I can't. They would be angry."

"Well, let them be angry! Pass! Drive around, I tell you!"

Instead of passing, the chauffeur drew the private car up to the curb, got out, sat down on the curb and began to cry. He cried like a baby.

Later the foreigner said: "A Chinese chauffeur will never pass a Japanese car or truck, or a police car. For generations the common people have been subjected and taught servility and degradation. They must never be presumptuous enough to pass a policeman, an official, or a military man."

Recently I personally experienced this:

I went up to a motor car station in Shanghai and ordered a taxi. No other person was in the station. There was no taxi at the moment and the Chinese clerk in charge told me I would have to wait for about five minutes. I waited. Within a few minutes a Japanese came up and ordered a taxi. Soon a Jap-

and desires of the whole of society, and, for the lack of a free interchange with it, must remain broken off and incomplete? If this be true, then, though it is knowledge, it comes also to be the exact opposite of knowledge; it becomes, this machine labor and "casual drift of routine", an alien pressure upon the mind, an "occupational psychosis", a list of inescapable images, meaningless and oppressive, obstructing the living play of his senses and his development.

These contradictions, inherent in both the relations and the qualities of popular life, Sandburg plots out with his totalitarian image of the People, in which all classes, all varieties of knowledge, all opposing forces, are dissolved. The People as a whole holds all of knowledge and experience in its bosom; but it is knowledge and experience in which no dynamic principle is identified; it is reality as a phenomenological catalogue, in which all things line up equally with all others; it is the indiscriminate evolutionary equalitarianism which the wrong-headed so frequently attribute to socialist philosophy.

American populism developed the poetic forms of the catalogue, the image, and free rhythms because it tried to become the expression of the life of the masses. It lost its dynamic quality with the falling away of popular enthusiasm—to perform in his day what Whitman did in his, Sandburg would be compelled to introduce into his poetry a new dynamic principle of social propulsion, that of the class struggle. But his populist outlook has failed to become aware of this objective dynamic and the new tragic and hopeful sentiments that arise from it. Instead, he postulates a classless *human* society at the present time and at all times; his point of view permits the ideal to replace the reality, and its undramatic optimism to overgrow the clear and arduous paths of history.

Hence Sandburg can develop no new form, but is restricted to the forms originated by Whitman 75 years ago: the image, the catalogue, street speech, commercial and professional dialect, prose rhythms; complicated by the indecisive subjective sentiment of the people's goodness and misery and creative destiny.

With or without the sentiment, this is as far as American poetry has gone. The proletarian poets, making more or less use of the modernist "deviation" (Schneider and Gold, for instance, being unable to understand its critical function with respect to the emotions—some of the younger poets, on the other hand, accepting formalism as the natural and exclusive language of poetry) have, so far, failed to rise above the populist current. Fearing, for example, whose handling of the catalogue device is firmer and more contemporaneously nervous than Sandburg's, is, however, more remote than the latter from its social origins and is even weaker in conviction;

he is closer to a Marxist position only in the negative sense of having lost a good part of the latter's populist delusions.

Vachel Lindsay's poetry provides the material for an accurate estimate of the class basis of the populist spirit in American poetry, and of the reasons why its modern revival originated in the Middle West. The poetry of Lindsay is characterized by the internal conflicts of a peasant intelligence developing in a society penetrated by urban and industrial influences. His *Santa-Fé Trail*, describing an automobile with such lines as:

Its eyes are lamps like the eyes of dragons.

It drinks gasoline from big red flagons,

and with its contrast of the hurtling cars with the sweet-singing, restfully melancholy, homely-entitled bird, the Rachel-Jane, recalls nothing so much as the folk songs of Eastern Europe during the first days of mechanized transportation. Through the city he walks like a stranger. Whatever he finds memorable in its life, tends to remain static in his mind, slowly expanding itself into a large iridescent bubble of myth. The dancing, crap-shooting Negroes of the big-city slums become voodoo-worshippers of the African Congo; the Chinese laundryman of San Francisco, ironing away through the night to earn his bread, is surrounded by nightingales, ladies and gods of the past; the city householder waking at midnight hears overhead the rushing ghosts of the buffaloes.

His conception of poetry itself is a peasant conception: ballads, with easy, old-time rhymes, and repeated refrains and choruses. It is not popular poetry in Whitman's sense of poetry of the occupations and movements of the people; it is popular verse in the antique sense of something an audience likes to sing or recite dreamily around an outdoor fireside. Lindsay's contemporaneity is less conscious, less purposeful, less responsible than Sandburg's. He employs the facts of modern industrial life only because they have forced themselves into every American terrain no matter how distant. These unwelcome modern facts he struggles to restore to a pre-industrial setting. Thus he reveals, perhaps more clearly than any other modern American poet, the class basis of modern American populism: the farmer relating himself to city life and the working class.

How far this populist spirit can go, even while making use of forms older than those which is consciously developed for itself, is revealed in Lindsay's famous *Abraham Lincoln Walks At Midnight*, reprinted in the present volume. Lincoln was the hero of this movement from the beginning. In his mind the idea of progress took the form of the idea of human liberty. Why should not Lindsay find that, walking into our modern day

He cannot rest until a spirit-dawn

Shall come:—the shining hope of Europe free:

The league of sober folk, the Workers' Earth,

anese woman and two children came up and also ordered a car.

Then the Chinese clerk in charge of the station turned to me and said: "You can have the third car. There are two other people before you!"

"I was here first. These people came after me," I protested.

"Well, you must take the third car. You must wait," he repeated.

"What do you mean! I was here first and you are giving this car to these people because they are Japanese."

The Chinese clerk was frightened. "You must wait," he repeated to me.

I went up to a taxi that rolled in, but the chauffeur would not allow me to take the car because a Japanese was waiting. There was nothing for me to do but leave the station.

Incidents similar to this I have witnessed in many parts of China. There is today in China a degradation, a servility before the Japanese that is indescribable. The origin of it is to be sought, not in the Chinese masses, but in Nanking. Since the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in September, 1931, the Nanking Government and all its officials and military men have told the Chinese people that China is too weak to fight, that it must submit. For five years the whole Chinese press, the schools, and all other public institutions, have taught this demoralizing idea. Vast Chinese armies have retreated before a handful of Japanese. Slowly but surely the poison of fear and servility has seeped into the blood of China. The Japanese no longer need to use guns to conquer the country. All they have to do is to send an unarmed Japanese woman or child, or a Japanese or Korean gangster, and get all they want.

The Japanese know this. They have no fear of any Chinese except the Communists and the Chinese Red Army. These they fear and these forces alone, with their sympathizers, prevent the Japanese from openly occupying the country. Every other Chinese they can scare to death.

The press has just reported this typical incident: Along the Lunghai Railway in Honan Province in Central China, two Japanese got on the train. The Chinese conductor went through the cars and asked for tickets. He asked the Japanese for tickets also. They shrugged their shoulders and replied "May yo" (have not), then turned and gazed placidly out of the window. The conductor asked again but the Japanese replied the same. The conductor shifted from foot to foot, then went away.

Soon a group of armed Chinese railway gendarmes—the terror of poor Chinese—came through the car. They halted before the Japanese and asked for their tickets. The two Japanese again shrugged their shoulders, said "May yo," and gazed placidly out of the window. The gendarmes asked again but the Japanese did not even reply. Like whipped dogs

the gendarmes sneaked away and left the car,—and the Japanese rode without tickets.

The Japanese ride free on the trains of China. The same Chinese gendarmes who will beat a poor Chinese to death if they catch him on a train without a ticket, crawl like worms before a Japanese. Often I have related these incidents to friends. Bitter arguments ensue. "What do you expect?" they ask: "Do you expect these conductors and gendarmes to disobey the Nanking Government? Do you expect them to do what the whole Chinese army is ordered not to do—fight the Japanese on the spot?"

"They could put the Japanese off the train."

"Yes—and the Nanking Government would instruct the Governor of the Province in question to hand the Japanese Consul an official letter of apology,—with indemnity."

Then someone adds: "Why should the Japanese act other than they do? Who is going to stop them?"

"The Red Army and its allies will stop them!"

"The Nanking Government wages war on the Red Army to prevent that."

"For the time being only. Wait. The time will come when it can no longer do that."

"All right," reply my friends, "until then the Japanese can do as they please."

On the Peiping-Tientsin train a short time ago I watched some fifty Japanese and Koreans take possession of a second-class car. They had bags of silver which they were taking out of China. They were not "smuggling" as the press likes to say; they were quite openly taking it out just as they quite openly bring in "smuggled" goods. Chinese coolies had carried the silver onto the train for them, and the armed guards on the car steps had stepped aside politely and allowed them all to pass. Inside, the Chinese conductor opened the compartment doors for them, bowed and smiled a welcome. Later this conductor went through the car again, opened the compartment doors, bowed and smiled and passed on. But when he came to me, he asked for my ticket. He bowed to the Japanese and Koreans in my compartment, smiled, but did not dare ask them for their tickets. In fury, I said to him: "Shame! Shame!"

In my anger I followed him into the corridor and down the car, watching him welcome these gangsters. "Shame on you, a Chinese worker!" I kept saying. He kept his head turned from me, but continued his degradation. The Japanese and Korean gangsters did not even notice him, but took his servility as their right.

Better that a people disappear from the face of the earth than accept such a fate as this. Better that individual Chinese revolt and die on the spot, rather than endure this. That which makes them men is gone. After that, existence has no meaning.

I was passing the Japanese Embassy in Peiping. At the entrance stood one lone Japanese soldier, with fixed gun. The gate opened and Chinese workers, apparently leaving work for the day, passed from the Embassy grounds into the street. They walked single-file, and as they passed this Japanese soldier, they halted, removed their hats, and bowed to the earth. The Japanese soldier stared before him and appeared not even to notice them. A whole line of some twenty Chinese workers passed, bowing to the earth, hats in hand.

It seemed to me that this was worse than death. Chinese workers, once organized, strong and proud, have been beaten down by the Chinese ruling class until they are today like worms before a single Japanese. Their dignity as men is gone.

"Rather death than this!" I protest to others.

"They must think of their families," people reply.

"Families—why should Chinese families live to exist in slavery?"

"If they refuse to bow, that Japanese would stick his bayonet through them."

"Good—rather that, than this degradation."

"What do you expect of the Chinese common people? For generations their own rulers have treated them exactly as the Japanese treat them today. They have robbed them, looted them, beaten them, killed them, used them as nothing but creatures to make money for them. Now, suddenly, you expect these Chinese to act like men before a foreign invasion."

Yet the Chinese people do struggle, are not slaves. Else why does the Nanking Government pass Special Emergency Laws against the national liberation movement, wage war on the Red Army, and form an Anti-Red Pact with the Japanese invaders? Why does the Japanese Army hesitate to occupy all China? Not from fear of the Chinese ruling class—but from fear of the Chinese people under the influence of the Communists. That and that alone holds them back. But the Japanese have no fear of the Chinese rulers today. Every time the Japanese ambassador, or some petty Japanese official calls on the Nanking Minister of Foreign Affairs, this latter gentleman gets diarrhea.

The Japanese have killed another of their own countrymen in China. This is the third such murder in recent months and two of them have been in Shanghai. The men killed are all insignificant, unimportant men. The murderers are said by the Japanese to be Chinese, yet no Chinese has been captured.

Everyone knows the Japanese order these killings, that they may use them to exert new pressure on the Nanking Government. Perhaps to get new secret agreements signed. Perhaps to force the withdrawal of Chinese troops from Hopei Province in the North, to get the "right" to station troops in Shantung Province and to take over that Province, to get

new economic concessions, or to take over Shanghai. Even now the Japanese use these killings to police the International Settlement of Shanghai. Squads of Japanese marines, armed to the teeth, patrol Shanghai streets where no Japanese live. The British Consul-General of Shanghai aids them in every way. The Germans aid them. The other foreigners bow to them and remark fatalistically that soon the Japanese will take over and run the International Settlement. And with this, they will control the wealth of the Yangtze Valley, and the source of income of the Nanking Government which is and always has been but the tail to this citadel of Far Eastern colonial reaction.

China is sinking—sinking not only physically, but morally, spiritually. Every Chinese under the influence of the Nanking Government is terrified by the Japanese, degraded, servile. Every Chinese under the influence of the Communists, of the Red Army, is filled with contempt and bitter hatred for Nanking and Japan and all their ways.

Happy Birthday

JOSEPH BRIDGES

ALBERT woke up, stretched, yawned and looked at the clock. It was 10:30. After a minute he put on his bathrobe and went into the kitchen.

His mother was peeling potatoes. "Good morning," she said smiling. He said, "Good morning," set the bread in the toaster, and fixed the orange juice.

"Happy birthday," his mother said.

Albert put coffee into the percolator. "What?" He grinned. "Oh yes. Thanks."

"My little boy is twenty-two." She patted him on the back. "A great big man."

"That's right."

"I haven't been able to get you anything, but I'm baking a cake for dinner and I'll give you a little check next week."

"It doesn't make any difference," Albert replied absently. Sitting in the sunlight, he ate his breakfast and read the *Literary Digest*. He felt weak and stuffy: he had slept too long. Pouring a second cup of pale coffee, he remarked, "The *Digest* is getting punk. No pep."

"I don't like it much either," his mother answered. "But Uncle Ralph gave us the subscription and it keeps coming." He turned the page and read "The Lexicographer's Easy Chair". "Sometimes the poetry page is good," she added.

Albert lighted a cigarette. He burned his hand on the toaster, and yanked the cord out. He threw the