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You Who Are Out—Act!

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I HAVE received a flaming appeal from a comrade of ours—an appeal to issue a call to action to you who are out, to rally to the cause of your comrades who are in prison. This is the appeal:

"Oh, Fraina, are we not cowards to stand by limply like this when our strongest men and women are behind bars which we could break?

"Are we not hypocrites to assemble on Sunday afternoons, as if to enjoy ourselves, listen to a few speeches, and pass a few innocent resolutions?

"We do not take it seriously. Wake us up! Speak to us from your cell!

"Why don't our comrades appeal to us, the mass for whom they were imprisoned?

"We do not realize the awfulness of it all. Why do you men let us forget our mission? Appeal to us! We would be base indeed if the voices of our celled comrades cannot wake us from this lethargy."

I am urged, and I shall speak.

I shall not speak for myself. My term ends in a few days; it was a very short term. I shall speak of my comrades who are serving long terms in prisons that cannot break their spirits or degrade them, but which *do* torture them. I shall speak, moreover, not of them and for them principally, but of and for the Cause for which they are imprisoned.

For our imprisoned comrades are not the least fortunate. They do not envy the physical liberty of men and women who are intellectually in thrall to Capitalism. The iron bars of their cells, of their prisons, cannot imprison their ideals, their minds; and while the mind is free, one is supreme and may mock at governments and at iron bars, mock even while the body is being broken. They suffer, but their ideals come first. They desire liberation, because, after all, they may then contribute more than they are contributing now.

The imprisonment of our comrades is testimony to the brutality and class character of the government; but it is equally testimony to the lack of power of Socialism. Karl Liebknecht goes out in the streets of Berlin urging *armed revolt* against the old Imperial government—four and one-half years in prison; Eugene Debs *speaks* against the war and in favor of the Bolsheviki—ten years in prison! The Italian Socialist Serrati is convicted of high treason—eighteen months in prison; but, for the most trivial offenses, scores of our comrades are serving three and five, ten and twenty-year terms. The savagery of the American government in its attitude to political criminals has been unparalleled. But the "clemency" of the German, French, Italian and British governments is a consequence not of their being less savage, but of the power and consciousness of the proletariat. The American government is as savage as it is because it believes the proletariat will not protest in action against tyranny and reaction. Acquiescence invites repression. . . .

Your comrades are in prison. In a world trampling upon ideals, they maintain their ideals; at a time when the majority are thinking in terms of the military struggle, they think in terms of the proletarian class struggle. Apparently reaction is all conquering, omnipotent; but the tens and hundreds of men and women who are now in iron cells, and whose spirit sings in joy at the onward sweep of the Revolution—these men and women mock at the temporary triumph of reaction; they are symbols of the action and ideals latent in the masses which, once acquiring full expression, will crush the reaction. They are augurs of the Revolution.

Your comrades are in prison. They are there because they could not let the flame of freedom die. They are there as a protest against the democracy of words and the tyranny of deeds. They are there that the proletariat may awaken to consciousness; that the soldier may not offer up life in the service of death; that the world may cease being a shambles; that the mother may not weep for her son and the sweetheart for her lover. They are in prison that liberty may prevail; they are deprived of life, that life may conquer death.

Your comrades are in prison. They are in prison, above all, that Socialism may conquer—that the mass of the people may cease being pariahs, and the world smile in the joy of life, instead of agonize in the sorrow of death.

Your comrades are in prison—for you, men, and for you, women. Are you out there for *them?* . . .

I know that you are striving to liberate them, that you are eager to welcome them home—to life and the great struggle. But my pen stops; my eyes look straight ahead—there are the iron bars of my cell; six feet beyond are still more iron bars; then come the windows, barred with iron; and outside is the prison wall. The keepers are bawling out orders. . . . In another cell is Roger Baldwin, in another Ralph Chevney; other comrades in other cells, in this one prison alone. And—but how many prisons *are* there in this free nation of ours? . . .

Are you doing all that could be done for your imprisoned comrades? I have no right to ask this in the name of myself, but have I not the right to ask in the name of tens and hundreds of imprisoned men and women—Comrades all?

The anguished appeal of our young comrade is lofty and intense—is it true?

I know that it is an impatient appeal—that it is the flaming appeal, naive perhaps, of the ardent spirit of youth—impetuous, irrepressive, eager for the moon. It is all that. But is not the spirit of Revolution the spirit of youth? Are we not apt to become *too* patient, to accept routine for action, to get into a state of mind bordering on lethargy? The complacency must be shocked out of us. I have been guilty myself; I was bordering on lethargy, my other imprisoned comrades becoming a memory, when this appeal flamed through me and restored my spirit. Are not you, O comrade, perhaps equally guilty? The impatient, irrepressible, hasty spirit of ardent youth is the spirit of Revolution—Germinal.

The indictment of our young comrade is too sweeping. I admit that. Meetings are necessary; resolutions are necessary. Aggressive agitation is itself an act of Revolution. For many lonely years the revolutionary activity of the Bolsheviki was limited in this way. But we are apt to do that which the Bolsheviki never did—accent the means for the goal, forget that agitation is simply a preparation for creative action. Youth is apt to repudiate the necessity for the hard, grim work of preparation; but is not experience apt to grow cold, calculating and obstructive, losing the first line flush of revolutionary ardor?

Will the time for action never come? That is the query of your imprisoned comrades. They have a right to ask. Their imprisonment, in itself, contributes nothing to the Revolution; it is a magnificent gesture, and nothing more, ***unless it inspires you to action and you use their imprisonment to arouse the action of the masses.*** The ideals of the individual are a source of Revolution only as they become mass ideals.

Our activity might become still larger and more intense—not one of you, I believe, will dispute this. But that is not the issue. It is not the lack of propaganda, but the *character* of this propaganda that is at issue. And, I must confess, the propaganda for our imprisoned comrades is in general a bourgeois liberal propaganda. It is not revolutionary agitation. It is not directed toward *action*. Expressing indignation, indulging in protests—*that* accomplishes very little. Our imprisoned comrades, their ideals and their action must be made an issue of the proletarian class struggle; the bourgeois liberal attitude is worse than impotent, it promotes reaction. This issue and all other issues, must be met by an intensive, aggressive agitation for revolutionary mass action. The party must revolutionize its policy and agitation.

The official party policy in general is largely bourgeois liberal—not the implacable policy of revolutionary Socialism. We must learn, we must acquire the new spirit of the Revolution; we must reconstruct and reorganize. We must devote ourselves anew to the revolutionary class struggle.

"Are we not cowards to stand by limply like this when our strongest men and women are behind bars which we could break?"

You could break the iron bars of our prisons—and of Capitalism. We could, you and I, and the masses; we intend to—but do we, really and seriously, flamingly, or is it simply an intention? Is it a resolve *instinct in immediate action,* or is it simply an ideal for the days to come?

Your imprisoned comrades call upon you to act—not for them, but for the revolutionary struggle. They depend upon this struggle. They will this struggle—necessary and relentless, beautiful and inspiring.

We must dare. We must issue the revolutionary challenge uncompromisingly. There are your imprisoned comrades; more—infinitely more—there is Russia and our own crisis; there is the international proletarian revolution—all insist upon action. We must flame out in challenge to Capitalism, but also to our own complacency, to our own inaction, to our own policy of hesitation. Fearless and aggressive in all things: scorning timidity and consequences.

We must dare, you and I, comrades. We must act, creatively and dynamically.

Break the iron bars, O comrades—the iron bars of our prisons, of your fears and prejudices, of moderate "Socialism," of Capitalism!

Break—and then we shall build anew, finely and humanly.