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The bohemian Bolsheviks

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Abstract

This project used two socialist magazines to analyze the relationship between radical politics and the historical moment. Political radicals worked outside of the mainstream and aimed to influence the creation of a dramatically different future. The question then was how did a group of radicals like those that worked on *The Masses* and the *Liberator* deal with the open contingency of history, that their imagined future may never come or could appear in a different form than they imagined, and how did they communicate that vision of the future in an intelligible way. Based on the magazines, I argued that radicals looked to models in the present that invoked characteristics in line with their idea of the future. At one point during *The Masses* that model was the bohemian artist who was free from restrictive bourgeois values and thus able to realistically represent life under capitalism. During the *Liberator* that model was the Bolshevik revolutionary who based pragmatic political decisions on objective facts to engineer social revolutions. In both cases, those models broke down as new events and changing political environments presented alternative models better suited for the current moment.

Introduction

In 1915 Floyd Dell saw a god. The renowned dancer Isadora Duncan, after spending years living in Europe, resettled her dancing school in New York in a loft on lower Fifth Avenue.[1] Dell, a writer and editor for the socialist magazine *The Masses*, based in Greenwich Village, compared Duncan's time in New York to a visit from a "young and rebellious demi-god of art."[2] Having seen Duncan perform for the first time, Dell hurried home and recorded his impression in a poem. He described her dancing as "A glimpse across the forward gulf of time to show our dazzled souls what life shall be upon the sun lit heights toward which we climb."[3] As a radical, Dell's politics oriented him towards the future. Dell and his colleagues in *The Masses* argued for a new America changed by revolutionary class struggle. With socialism as the changing agent, the bohemian style of artists like Duncan showed the possibilities of life during and after that change. For Dell, Duncan's free and natural style of dancing echoed the sort of traits that the revolution would universalize in every individual. A great artist, like a political radical, existed in the present as a reflection of a freer future.

By 1921 Isadora Duncan was a citizen of the Soviet Republic and *The Masses* was dead, replaced by the Bolshevik inspired *Liberator*. The bohemian model of the radical life, that Duncan represented and *The Masses* articulated, faded from view. In its place the successful example of the Russian Revolution offered something new. In the *Liberator*, many of the same radicals that had worked on *The Masses*, now viewed the ideal revolutionary not as a prophetic artist, but as a pragmatic scientist or engineer. It was the Bolsheviks command of the facts, not their free creative spirits, that made the revolution possible. Lenin replaced Duncan and other

[1] Floyd Dell, *Homecoming: An Autobiography* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1933), 274.
[2] Floyd Dell, "Fatten the Calf!" *The Masses*, May 1917, 13.
[3] Dell, *Homecoming*, 275.

bohemian artists as the model of living a revolutionary life. Like before, class struggle continued to serve as the means of revolutionary change but the role of who would manage or influence that struggle towards the socialist future adapted itself to models more in tune with the historical realities of the present.

This is the story of how that group of bohemian influenced socialists became Bolsheviks. An interesting episode in the history of the American left, this story is also a useful way of examining radical politics. More specifically in this case, *The Masses* and the *Liberator* allow us to look at how individuals construct themselves as precursors to the future revolutionary change that is their goal. Borrowing Leslie Fishbein's claim that *The Masses* tried "to live as one did before the revolution after the revolution has come…", I propose its successor the *Liberator* did this as well but based itself off a different model.[4] Inherent in the goals of both magazines was the creation of a future drastically different from the present. For that future to be intelligible both to themselves and their audience, *The Masses* and the *Liberator* advocated living the revolution based on historically specific models. Those models made it possible for radicals to live in a way that invoked the freedom of the future while influencing the movement toward that different world. Historically contingent, those models came from experiences in the present and were subject to change. The change from one model to the next, seen by the different phases in the magazines, went with different sets of values, understandings of politics, and approaches to art.

In Greenwich Village, the writers and artists behind *The Masses* took part in an explosion of free expression, one that fulfilled their sense that the class struggle moved history toward an

[4] Leslie Fishbein, *Rebels in Bohemia: The Radicals of the Masses, 1911-1917* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 208.

expansion of democracy. But democratic freedom was more than just a state of being for *The Masses* but the natural state of reality itself. This meant that every problem naturally had a variety of ways of dealing with it. As such *The Masses* committed itself to the principle of anti-dogmatism in all forms. Yet internal tensions appeared as radicals increasingly seemed sure that the cultural freedom they experienced in Greenwich Village was a precursor to the post-revolutionary life. This belief tied them to a predictive model that was unprepared for the contingency of history. The Bolsheviks then were the unforeseen historical example that radically altered their idea of living the revolution.

This tension carried with it a logic that helped to bridge the gap between *The Masses* and the *Liberator.* As the bohemian-inspired socialist approach of *The Masses* became less historically relevant, the Bolshevik example assured radicals that a new world was still possible. The success of the Russian revolution propelled Bolshevik leaders, as well as Russian workers, into the position once reserved for bohemian artists. The Russian example vindicated *The Masses* hope for a generalizable scientific model of revolution not limited by individual experiences. As importantly the vanguardism of the Bolshevik approach stressed the functional importance of an intellectual elite that could lead the working class into and through the revolution. Where they once imagined themselves as unbridled artists expressing reality, they now fashioned themselves as professional revolutionaries and pragmatic statesmen. These new roles originated from the Bolshevik example, which laid out the revolutionary path, now it was their job to influence its replication in the U.S.

Despite the foreign model, the *Liberator* remained bound to an American tradition and context. The old bohemian priorities that focused on freedom and creativity did not just evaporate into an unflinching commitment to Bolshevik discipline. The *Liberator*'s staff were not

party hacks repeating empty slogans. They still thought and felt deeply and as before made poor adherents to a single school of thought at the expense of others. They found themselves partly in a world of their own making and partly in one made by historical developments beyond their control. In this position, the *Liberator* tried to carry on the earlier spirit of *The Masses* but also adhere to what they believed were objective historical lessons that contradicted some of their core beliefs. These contradictions came to a head as the post-Bolshevik left coalesced around the Communist Party, which eventually bought the *Liberator* and imposed a collective model of the radical life at odds with the individualism of the magazine's earlier phase.

The bohemian *Masses* have attracted more attention from historians than the Bolshevik *Liberator.* Historians viewed the *Liberator* as an unworthy successor to what they saw as the more interesting and original *Masses.* This view ignores how the *Liberator* succeeded the earlier magazine by adapting itself to the evolving political environment. Despite only a four-month gap between the release of *The Masses'* last issue and the *Liberator's* first, historians treat that gap as a discontinuous break. Instead, my analysis treats the *Liberator* as a continuous second part of the project started in *The Masses.* Looking at the *Liberator* in this way lends an understanding of the magazine as a sign of the left in a flux state with one foot still married to the bohemian modernism of the teens and the other foot standing amid the communist influence of the 30s.

The end of the First World War, the Red Scare, and the emergence of the communist model did dramatically alter the content of the *Liberator*. The point is not to deny these differences but to understand them more fully by tracing their gradual impact. The *Liberator* did not appear instantaneously as something completely different from *The Masses.* Instead, *The Masses* and the *Liberator* represented attempts by the same group of radicals to live the revolution they hoped to inspire but in a way that aligned with historically specific revolutionary

models. This kind of change had already happened within *The Masses* with the move from its first co-operative phase to the revolutionary bohemianism it is famous for. Bohemianism was a historically specific movement tied to the cultural renaissance of the 1910s. They viewed bohemianism as a more modern form of expression that rejected old Victorian norms. Freed from those cultural restraints, the artists and writers behind *The Masses* felt more alike the working class who because of their economic position already lived outside Victorian standards. Yet, events in the late 1910s and early 1920s eroded radicals' faith in bohemianism and individual artistic expression more generally, while at the same time, the Russian Revolution offered a novel approach with a proven record.

This story told in full illustrates the complexity and continuity of these distinct attempts to live the revolution. This is different from the usual historical approach to *The Masses* and the *Liberator* mentioned above. Earlier historical treatments have continued with the assumption that *The Masses* was the more interesting source because it represented the meeting point of art and politics during the cultural revolt of the early 20th century. At the other end, historians interested in the communist movement skipped over the *Liberator* in favor of the longer running *New Masses* tied to the proletarian art of the Stalinist period.[5] In both cases the *Liberator* served as a less interesting sequel or an out-of-place precursor. Countering this trend, I argue the *Liberator* was an important expression of American radicalism in the 20th century. The *Liberator's* reporting on the Russian Revolution was the first impression of the Soviet state for thousands of radicals. The narrative and interpretation it created and spread influenced many of those same radicals to oppose the traditional Socialist Party and create communist alternatives. Unlike the

[5] See Alan Wald, *Exiles from a Future Time: The Forging of Mid-Twentieth Century Literary Left* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

Party dominated political outlook of the 30s, the early phase of the *Liberator* featured a different model of living the revolution, based not on collective discipline, but on individual states of mind. If socialism merged with the cultural revolt of Greenwich Village to create a model of living the revolution where everyone became an artist, the political revolt in Russia promised a new model that made every individual into a pragmatic scientific thinker.

Looking at the field, two distinct approaches influence the study of *The Masses*. The first approach viewed both *The Masses* and the *Liberator* primarily as political artifacts. In this case, *The Masses* served as a relic of a rich American tradition of socialism free of communist influence. The historian Thomas Malik described his work as connecting "the ideals of the magazine with the tradition of American literature and society as it emerged in the nineteenth century with such radical figures as Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau."[6] Irving Howe echoed this idea writing "They swore by Marx, but behind them could still be heard the voices of Thoreau and Wendell-Phillips- and it was a good thing."[7] The Americanness of *The Masses* was seen not only in the traditions it called upon but also in its pluralistic approach to politics. In *Heretics & Hellraisers,* Margaret Jones described *The Masses* as "intellectually eclectic, as interested in psychoanalysis as in socialism, in feminism as in free verse."[8] This eclecticism both encouraged and captured the free-spirited optimism of the historical moment.

While Jones argued this ideological openness made *The Masses* an important fusion of feminism and socialism, Fishbein described it more critically as a form of radical innocence. In

[6] Thomas A. Maik, *The Masses Magazine (1911-1917): Odyssey of an Era* (New York: Garland Pub, 1994), 12.
[7] William L. O'Neill, ed., *Echoes of Revolt: The Masses, 1911-1917* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1989), 7.
[8] Margaret C. Jones, *Heretics & Hellraisers: Women Contributors to The Masses, 1911-1917* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 3.

Rebels in Bohemia Fishbein argued that *The Masses'* lack of specific ideological attachments contributed to its inability to stand up to the influence of communist discipline. Nevertheless, she remained nostalgically inspired by the magazine: "The new radicals existed in that special time before the revolution when one's goals seem tantalizingly near, when excitement adds spice to commitment, when the personal and the political fuse to release new sources of human energy."[9] This nostalgic attachment for the kind of socialism practiced by *The Masses* was also present in Irving Howe's introduction to the *Echoes of Revolt* collection. He writes "History cannot be recalled, but in this instance at least, nostalgia seems a part of realism. For whom among us, if enabled by some feat of imagination, would not change places with the men of *The Masses* in their days of glory?"[10] In both cases, *The Masses* served as a symbol of artistic socialism at odds with the dogmatism of the contemporary left.

As such this approach treated the *Liberator* as a marker for the start of the corrosive communist influence. Howe recalled that "our radicalism took a disastrous plunge into a peculiarly sterile form of communism…"[11] He continued explaining how the *Liberator* "took a hand in stirring up the infantile disorders of communism."[12] While less dramatic Fishbein also criticized the communist post-war turn. For Fishbein "The war and the Bolshevik Revolution forced radicals to choose between bohemianism and political commitment."[13] She concluded that "the promise of these years died with the Great War and the Russian Revolution."[14] In these

[9] Fishbein, *Rebels in Bohemia*. 205.
[10] O'Neill, *Echoes of Revolt*. 8.
[11] O'Neill. 5.
[12] O'Neill.
[13] Fishbein, *Rebels in Bohemia*. 204.
[14] Fishbein. 205.

cases, historians lamented the loss of a certain kind of leftism with the *Liberator* symbolizing one of the first steps in the wrong direction.

The second approach to these magazines views them primarily as cultural artifacts. Instead of symbolizing the pre-communist American left, historians connected *The Masses* to a broader cultural shift away from the 19th century Victorian past toward 20th-century modernism. In her book, *American Moderns* Christine Stansell explained that for moderns "The old world was finished, they believed -the world of Victorian America, with its stodgy bourgeois art, its sexual prudery and smothering patriarchal families, its crass moneymaking and deadly class exploitation."[15] She continued explaining how "The new world, the germ of a truly modern America, would be created by those willing to repudiate the cumbersome past and experiment with form, not just in painting and literature, the touchstones of European modernism, but also in politics and love, friendship and sexual passion."[16] In Stansell's account, *The Masses* was one of the key publications contributing to this new milieu. The figures behind it, like Max Eastman, Floyd Dell, and John Reed, joined a larger cast of bohemians who treated life itself as an art. As such, artistic sensibility infused with politics creating a culturally sensitive left with an attentive audience of artists, writers, and poets.

The Masses played a similar role in Henry F. May's *The End of American Innocence.* He began the book by explaining that "Everyone knows that at some point in the twentieth century America went through a cultural revolution. One has only to glance at the family photograph album, or pick up a book or magazine dated, say, 1907, to find oneself in a completely vanished

[15] Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010). 1.
[16] Stansell. 2.

world."[17] He spent the rest of the book locating and describing the rebellion that dismantled 19th century Victorianism. By characterizing this period as a rebellion May showed how the rebels themselves were products of the 19th century American traditions they were attacking. He summarized *The Masses* role in this rebellion noting how "It drew on the rich underground tradition of popular skepticism, it gave vent to the suppressed humor of newspaper cartoonists, and it gave full scope to the irreverence and taste for novelty fostered by the Rebellion."[18] He continued explaining that *The Masses* "political message was confusing and not very important; its tone unforgettable."[19] In both of these larger cultural histories, *The Masses* was treated as an important product of a greater movement but at the cost of the specificity of some of the magazine's political goals.

In contrast to these broader approaches were cultural studies of *The Masses* in isolation. Books like *Art and Politics* by Richard Fitzgerald or *Art for the Masses* by Rebecca Zurier. In both cases, these books highlighted the often-excellent work created for the magazine as well as the artists behind it. At the same time, both historians raised questions about the relationship between political ideology and artistic expression. Fitzgerald was one of the few historians to include *The Liberator* as part of his study, partially because his book focused on the individual artists many of whom continued contributing to the later publication. His primary concern was examining why radical politics appealed to so many artists and to illustrate the relationship between artistic form and political theory.[20] Fitzgerald found the cause of this attraction in the changing nature of the art market which reduced artists from craftsmen selling products to

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[17] Henry Farnham May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time, 1912-1917* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), Ix.
[18] May, *The End of American Innocence,* 317.
[19] May.
[20] Richard Fitzgerald, *Art and Politics: Cartoonists of the Masses and Liberator* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1973). 3.

workers selling their labor power to large corporations. He explained that “In other words, they alienated their ability to create art.”[21] Given the changing landscape, what magazines like *The Masses* offered in creative freedom made up for what they lacked in profitability. This marriage between a socialist magazine looking for artwork and artists looking for creative freedom and an audience resulted in what Fitzgerald calls “a peculiarly artistic conception of socialism.”[22] He continued explaining how “Forging socialism was to them… primarily a cultural, not an economic problem.”[23] For Fitzgerald, the increasingly communist influenced *Liberator* made the tensions between what artists wanted from socialism and what this more dogmatic socialism wanted from artists more explicit.

Despite the difference in scope and guiding questions, the cultural approach follows the same pattern as seen in the political one. *The Masses* were privileged as the more important subject of study. *The Liberator* and communism more generally appear as the catalyst for the end of the freer bohemian period. For example, regarding the *Liberator*’s buy out by the Communist Party, Fitzgerald claimed this caused a shift where "The artist went off in one direction, the revolutionaries in another."[24] Again the suggestion was that the forces that made *The Masses* unique were only residually contained in the *Liberator.* I suggest putting this pattern to the test and asking whether it is a useful way of understanding this period or if it is an assumption that obscures more than it reveals.

The source base for this thesis is primarily the magazines themselves. The political focus of my argument makes nonfiction reporting and editorials the most overtly useful. Despite this,

[21] Fitzgerald. 5.
[22] Fitzgerald. 228.
[23] Fitzgerald.
[24] Fitzgerald.

my work does not ignore the diversity in each issue of both magazines. *The Masses* and the *Liberator* both featured political writing, fiction, poetry, and art. The variety of styles and mediums included construct a larger political message and reveals a certain theory of how art related to reality. Art's ability to depict the real was an important aspect of how artists and intellectuals viewed their connection to the more grounded revolutionary subjects. I will also consult the wider literary world around *The Masses* and *Liberator,* meaning books written by contributors, memoirs, and work featured in other magazines.

The New Masses, or the third part of this story, still needs to be told. I have deliberately excluded this publication from my analysis. *The New Masses* started only two years after the end of the *Liberator* and was a successor to the earlier magazines but was also never independently owned. Unlike the *Liberator,* which became controlled by the Workers Party, *The New Masses* began as a party publication. This lack of initial independence separates *The New Masses* from its predecessors. Also, while there was some overlap between the contributors to the *Masses/Liberator* and *The New Masses,* older key figures are missing or appear in a reduced role. More importantly, a new cast of personalities filled in for these absences disrupting the continuity of personal between the magazines. *The New Masses* deserves historical examination because of its longevity, running from 1926 to 1948, almost twice as long as both *The Masses* and *The Liberator.* Including *The New Masses* in this study would do more harm than good. This important source base deserves to be examined but, in this case, it would outstretch my analysis and time.

A brief word on terms. This thesis refers to bohemianism as a specific reference to the cultural change that occurred in cities across the country but was especially associated with Greenwich Village in the early 20th century. Influenced by Stansell's argument, this form of

bohemianism was a specific American modernism more concerned with content than form. For example, while many of the artists and poets published in *The Masses* continued to adhere to traditional artistic conventions, their subject matter, focusing on the poor, vagrants, and prostitutes was a deliberate attempt to break out of Victorian restrictions. In this sense bohemianism was about realistically portraying modern urban life free from the obstruction of bourgeois morals. Also, the section on the *Liberator* deliberately uses bolshevism instead of communism. The early phase of the magazine regularly referred to itself as Bolshevik and given the importance of historically specific models of living the revolution, that phrase featured sets of principles different from the final communist phase.

The Masses

Piet Vlag started *The Masses* in 1911. After working for the Rand School of Social Science as the manager of the school's in-house restaurant, Vlag capitalized on his connections with socialist intellectuals and writers in New York.[25] At the time, the Rand School was an important meeting place and training ground for leftists that hoped to educate the future leaders of the labor movement. [26] *The Masses* was a way for that education to reach outside the classroom. To attract the widest possible audience *The Masses* featured art, fiction, and political writing. Though, in this original period, the balance between art and politics favored the latter. Vlag envisioned the magazine as not just an advocate for socialism but the co-operative movement. In the first editorial, Thomas Seltzer explained "The significance of a powerful co-operative organization for the Socialist movement in this country can not be questioned…Where other socialist appeals fail to obtain a hearing, the appeal to the revolt against high prices and the increased cost of living will be heard."[27] This specific socialist approach was at the core of the early *Masses* on and off the page. The magazine itself was a co-operative. Contributors submitted work without pay but did have creative control over the magazine in the form of collective editorial meetings.

A year later, *The Masses* was stalling. The magazine dreamed of influencing a world where "The worker buys his goods at a Socialist Co-Operative store; sees his plays at a Socialist Co-operative theatre; studies the structure of society in a Socialist Cooperative classroom; and

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[25] Rachel Schreiber, *Gender and Activism in a Little Magazine: The Modern Figures of the Masses* (Farnham ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub, 2011), 4. Also, an ad for this restaurant is featured in the February 1911 issue of *The Masses.*
[26] Rand School of Social Science, *The Case of the Rand School* (New York: Rand School, 1919).
[27] Thomas Seltzer, "Editorial," *The Masses*, January 1911, 3.

very often reads a Socialist Co-operative newspaper."[28] That dream did not appear any closer to reality in 1912. The increasing amount of time the magazine ate up from Vlag's schedule impeded his ability to organize directly. The situation became worse when both Thomas Seltzer and Horatio Winslow stepped away from the managing editor position. Now Vlag had the dual role of managing both the funds and content of *The Masses.* A poor fundraiser, *The Masses* quickly ran out of money. In response, Vlag arranged for the merger of *The Masses* with another radical magazine published in Chicago.[29] Threatened by the potential loss of *The Masses* as an outlet for their non-commercial work, a group of regular contributors bought out Vlag's shares, taking all legal control away from him. With the threat of the merger evaded, the lack of funds still made publishing the magazine impossible.

The artists and writers now in control included John Sloan and Art Young, two talented cartoonists, and the poet Louis Untermeyer, among others.[30] Able figures in their respective fields, the group still lacked the fundraising abilities needed to even cover the bare minimum of operating costs. In dire need of money, Art Young proposed a solution. He had recently met a former Ph.D. student and lecturer named Max Eastman at a dinner held in honor of Jack London. Eastman and Young spent most of the dinner chatting about, as Young recalled, "the possibility of building up *The Masses* into a magazine which would have the bold tone and high quality…" of the European satire magazines "which were inspiring to the world's rising young artists."[31] Young was impressed by Eastman and nominated him to be the new editor. Less of a job offer and more a conscription, Eastman inherited *The Masses* in a financially nonfunctional state. He proved to be an apt fundraiser and, as hinted in his conversation with Young, had a bold new

[28] "Editorials," *The Masses,* May 1911, 3.
[29] Floyd Dell, *Homecoming* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1933), 248-249.
[30] Max Eastman, *Love and Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1964), 16.
[31] Art Young, *Art Young His Life and Times* (New York: Sheridan House, 1939), 275.

vision for the magazine. After four months since the last issue, *The Masses* returned to newsstands in December 1912.

The first issue of the Eastman era featured a bold declaration of intent. On the opening page, Eastman wrote "We shall have no further part in the factional disputes within the Socialist Party; we are opposed to the dogmatic spirit which creates and sustains these disputes. Our appeal will be to the masses, both Socialist and Non-Socialist, with entertainment, education, and livelier kinds of propaganda."[32] *The Masses* no longer advocated for a particular school of thought or expressed the explicit interest of a certain organization. The only commitment was to the class struggle and revolution articulated not through dry didactic screeds but satire that praised wit, humor, and creativity. The magazine's new masthead written jointly by Eastman and the maverick reporter John Reed made this new tone clear. *The Masses* was now "a magazine with a sense of humor and no respect for the respectable; frank, arrogant, impertinent, searching for the true causes; a magazine directed against rigidity and dogma wherever it is found… A magazine whose final policy is to do as it pleases and conciliate nobody, not even its readers."[33] This bold new tone helped *The Masses* find a devoted readership among the cultural rebels living in Greenwich Village and other epicenters of the bohemian revolt.

Eastman himself had been a resident of Greenwich Village since moving in with his sister Crystal to attend Columbia for his Ph.D. in 1910. In the Village, Eastman met his future wife Ida Rauh, whose restless creativity and political activism made her the ideal Village resident of that age. Rauh introduced Eastman to Marx and soon after he became a passionate socialist.[34] All of the other regular contributors to *The Masses* had similar connections to the Village. Floyd Dell,

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[32] Max Eastman, "Editorial Notice," *The Masses,* December 1912. 2.
[33] John Reed and Max Eastman, "A Free Magazine," *The Masses,* February 1913, 2.
[34] Eastman, *Love and Revolution,* 14.

who moved to New York in 1913, and shortly after became the associate editor of *The Masses,* recalled what made the neighborhood initially appealing. He explained that the Village had been "left to decay into a picturesque twentieth century slum… and this slum, for economic reasons, became increasingly the home of artists and writers."[35] While cheap living had consistently made the Village appealing to up and coming artists, it took the creation of two venues, the Liberal Club and Polly's Restaurant, to bring individual artists into a collective scene.[36]

Common meeting places helped to produce the group identity of the bohemians. The arrival of this new scene transformed Greenwich Village. For Dell "it was not any longer a quiet place, where nothing noisier happened than drunken artist merrymaking; ideas now began to explode there, and soon were heard all the way across the continent."[37] The bohemians of the early 20th century embraced every opportunity to dismantle the Victorian world in the hopes of creating a new modern culture. They looked to break Victorian cultural taboos of repression and compulsion in the name of freedom. Often this freedom took the form of lifestyle choices whose value came from how far they deviated from the inherited norms. Dell recalled this kind of outlandish behavior describing how on his first night living in the Village he "was taken to call upon a beautiful girl dancer who kept a pet alligator in her bathtub…"[38] Summarizing, Dell explained that the Village and the bohemian attitude of the time gave people "a refuge from Mother's morality."[39] By the summer of 1913, not only its contributors, but *The Masses* publishing office itself took refuge in the Village.[40]

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[35] Dell, *Homecoming,* 245.
[36] Dell, 246-247.
[37] Dell, 247.
[38] Dell.
[39] Dell, 272.
[40] *The Masses,* July 1913. The first issue with a mailing address in Greenwich Village. Also see Glenn O. Coleman, "Mid Pleasures and Palaces," *The Masses,* June 1914, 3.

The Masses became more bohemian during the Eastman era and its political goals extended beyond the class struggle to also include sexual liberation. Eastman himself first became involved in politics through the women's suffrage campaign and Floyd Dell's first published book was a study of modern feminism.[41] In *The Masses,* writers criticized the lack of commitment to sexual equality among the rest of the socialist and progressive movement. Eastman argued that "The awakening and liberation of woman is a revolution in the very process of life."[42] That revolution included more than just female suffrage, but a societal reordering of sexual norms. Their revolt against prudery materialized in different ways. Often as simple as encouraging the free exchange of ideas between men and women in Village cafes. At other times this revolt manifested itself in experiments in free love and the rejection of monogamy.[43]

This made *The Masses* natural allies of the nation's leading birth control activist Margret Sanger. The magazine came to her and her husband's defense after an undercover female police officer arrested him for handing out "obscene" pamphlets. Floyd Dell recalled that after defending the Sangers "the magazine was immediately flooded with thousands of letters from women, asking for information about the methods of birth control, and giving the best and most heart-breaking reasons for needing such information."[44] While this stance placed *The Masses* on the most progressive edge of the feminist movement at the time, it also put the magazine in opposition to one of its recurring rivals, the anti-vice activist Anthony Comstock. If bohemianism seemed like a cultural revolution, then Comstock was one of the chief counterrevolutionaries. His draconian tactics made him the human personification of Victorian moral tyranny. As such, Comstock was a consistent subject of *The Masses'* satirical ridicule, and

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[41] Floyd Dell, *Women as World Builders* (Chicago: Forbes and Company, 1913).
[42] Max Eastman, "Knowledge and Revolution," *The Masses*, January 1913, 5.
[43] Stansell, *American Moderns,* 273-309.
[44] Dell, *Homecoming,* 252.

his victims joined the ranks alongside striking workers and jailed labor leaders as martyrs for the revolution.

While the combination of socialism and bohemian influenced feminism set *The Masses* apart from other socialist publications, the unique structure of the editorial meetings also contributed to the democratic tone of the magazine. Dell fondly remembered how "Nobody gained a penny out of the things published in the magazine; it was an honor to get into its pages, an honor conferred by vote at the meetings."[45] Like a microcosm of the collective creative environment of Greenwich Village at large, the editorial meetings created "a little republic in which, as artists, we worked for the approval of our fellows, not for money."[46] Eastman remembered things differently. The co-operative tradition was something inherited from the Vlag period and continued despite Eastman's bold redirection in 1912. Eastman bluntly described the meetings as gatherings "in various studios to read manuscripts and vote on pictures and drink beer and talk. They would talk all night long if necessary…This naturally did not produce a magazine…"[47] The finished product truly came out of his and Dell's efforts as editors.

The co-operative meetings continued for the entirety of *The Masses'* run, but the First World War did inspire the closest thing the magazine ever had to an editorial line. *The Masses* had always been against militarism, but the World War was such a pressing issue that *The Masses* became increasingly focused on denouncing the War in general and the possibility of American involvement. The April 1915 magazine cover by George Bellows reflected the bleaker

[45] Dell, 251.
[46] Dell.
[47] Max Eastman, *Love and Revolution,* 17.

tone used to capture the horror of the War in Europe (Fig. 1). At the same time, Eastman and Reed regularly published columns exposing insidious motives behind the fighting.[48] Their argument claimed the cheap promises of nationalism were tricking the poor of Europe to slaughter each other. In a column, John Reed wrote "These toilers don't want war… But the speculators, the employers, the plutocracy- they want it, just as they did in Germany and England; and with lies and sophistries they will whip up our

Fig. 1 George Bellows, "Cover," *The Masses,* April 1915, 1.

[48] See the cover of the April 1915 or June 1916 issues of *The Masses* as examples of this. Also, Max Eastman's "In Case of War" column in the April 1917 issue of *The Masses.*

blood until we are savage- and then we'll fight and die for them."[49] *The Masses* argued that socialists and socialist parties should have a single unified policy: no war but class war.

A group of artists took exception to the increased editorial power of Eastman and the push for political art opposing the war. For Dell "the squabbles between literary and art editors were usually over the question of intelligibility and propaganda versus artistic freedom; some of the artists held a smoldering grudge against the literary editors and believed Max Eastman and I were infringing the true freedom of art by putting jokes or titles under the pictures."[50] The artists included Glenn Coleman and Stuart Davis who united behind John Sloan for what Eastman referred to as the "Greenwich Village revolt of 1916."[51] The rebel art editors briefly took control of the publishing company but in the process split the editorial staff. Art Young organized against Sloan, gathering the editors still loyal to Eastman effectively limiting the artists' ability to produce another issue for the next month. In the meantime, Eastman and Dell called on the support of some absentee stockholders, forcing a vote for control of the magazine that they won. The defeated artists resigned and out of solidarity another talented artist named Maurice Becker also left *The Masses.*[52]

Despite the loss, remarkably, the quality of *The Masses* did not suffer. The magazine attracted talent because, as Dorothy Day explained, "It was considered an honor to have one's work published by *The Masses."*[53] Day herself, having made a reputation in the radical scene through her support of the IWW and women's suffrage, became the de facto editor of the magazine during a brief period of absence by both Eastman and Dell. She fondly remembered

[49] John Reed "Whose War?" *The Masses,* April 1917, 11.
[50] Floyd Dell, *Homecoming,* 251.
[51] Max Eastman, *Love and Revolution,* 74.
[52] Floyd Dell, *Homecoming,* 250-251. Leslie Fishbein, *Rebels in Bohemia*, 22.
[53] Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness* (New York: Harper and Row, 1952), 82.

the “delightful summer in New York when I had their apartment on MacDougal Street to myself, and the job of editor to play with.”[54] Far from the only new talent, Cornelia Barns, Frank Walts, and Hugo Gellert joined Day as new contributors to *The Masses* in 1916 and 1917. While not financially successful *The Masses* was stable. That stability, ironically for a radical socialist magazine, came from upper-class donors, cultivated by Eastman. Never one to avoid a joke, even at their own expense, Eastman claimed *The Masses* was a gift to the working class from “the most imaginative millionaires in the Adolescence of the Twentieth Century.”[55] This dedicated base of wealthy patrons insured *The Masses* could confront controversial political issues and still have access to the funds required to publish a new issue every month. While the War had helped to motivate the departure of Sloan and others, this did not threaten *The Masses'* ability to continue publishing a well-received product. The actual entrance of America into the First World War, on the other hand, posed an insurmountable challenge for the radical publication.

As the nation went to war *The Masses* went to trial. The American entry into the War ended the toleration of anti-war views. Overnight bohemians and leftists became treasonous internal enemies. The post office refused to continue mailing *The Masses,* citing its anti-American content and its violation of the recently passed Espionage Law. Using this new law, the federal government charged Eastman, Dell, Young, and a handful of others including the poet Josephine Bell, who had never met her conspirators in person, with creating a "conspiracy to obstruct recruiting and enlistment."[56] Eastman did everything in his power to overturn the post office ban, including writing a series of letters to President Wilson which were published in *The Masses.* Even after securing a court order that declared the magazine in compliance with the law

[54] Day, *The Long Loneliness,* 79.
[55] Max Eastman, *Enjoyment of Living* (New York: Harper, 1948), 463.
[56] The Masses Defense Committee, “The Masses Case,” *The Liberator,* June 1918. 5.

and thus fit for sale, a counterappeal froze any new issues in legal purgatory. Eastman and others still managed to publish the final issue in November 1917. Drowning in legal conflicts and cut off from their audience *The Masses* ended abruptly on what Max Eastman remembered as "on the very date, almost, of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia."[57]

That final issue concluded with a message for its audience. On the last page, an ad for an upcoming article reminded readers that "John Reed is in Petrograd. He is writing about the Russian Revolution. His story of the first Proletarian Revolution will be an event in the world's literature."[58] The foreshadowing of this final page shows the direction *The Masses* was moving in and reminds us that the Bolshevik turn seen in the *Liberator* was on the horizon. With the Bolshevik revolutionary model looming over the final page, we should return to the beginning, to more fully articulate the historically unique attempts to live the revolution at different stages. Each of these attempts shaped key concepts related to social revolutions, namely what role art and intellectuals played in bringing on their desired future. Before the faith in bohemian creativity and expression, *The Masses* under Piet Vlag offered co-operation to create models of socialist economic activity while still under capitalism.

Co-Operation: The Meeting of Purchasing and Labor Power

In its first two years, *The Masses* hardly resembled its later more famous form. Quite different from the freewheeling openness of the Eastman period, the early issues of *The Masses* had a singular focus on the co-operative movement. In the inaugural editorial, Thomas Seltzer declared "The Masses is an outgrowth of the co-operative side of Socialist activity. Its publishers believe strongly in co-operation and will teach it and preach it vigorously through the columns of

[57] Max Eastman, *Love and Revolution*, 64.
[58] *The Masses*, November- December 1917. 44.

this magazine."[59] Historians have rarely covered this phase, eager to move onto the more dynamic Eastman era. But by reconceptualizing *The Masses* and the *Liberator* as a continuous radical project of living toward the coming revolution, this earlier phase reveals a unique attempt by radicals to do exactly that outside of socialist party electioneering and bohemian artistic rebellion.

The co-operative movement tried to create networks of businesses owned and operated by the employees. Vlag described the Belgian model he based his co-operatives off as shops where "all purchasers must be members, that all members share in the ownership, administration and benefits of the co-operative on absolutely equal terms."[60] These businesses would be alternative economic models to capitalism, free of exploitation by bosses or price gouging by middlemen making them beneficial to both employees and customers. On a larger scale, if all the supporters of the labor or socialist movement used co-operatives it would create a counter economic sphere that circulated money away from capitalistic businesses. The promise of the co-operative movement was "not merely the elimination of the grocer, but the centralization and the systematization of the purchasing power of the working class."[61] This threatened capitalism's need to not only buy labor but to also sell commodities. If the industrial laborer paid into the union to sell their labor collectively, consumers could use co-operatives to buy collectively. The dual strategy of industrial unionism and centralized buying offered by the co-operative movement amounted to a two-prong attack against capitalism.

This two-sided offensive gave people outside of the industrial working class a more significant role in combating the social system then just offering support. By doing this the co-

[59] Thomas Seltzer, *Editorial.* The Masses, January 1911.
[60] Piet Vlag, *The Masses,* September 1911, 19.
[61] *The Masses*, January 1911, 7.

operative movement answered Eugene Wood's concerns about those socialists “who sell our labor-power… in crafts that aren't organized or can't be organized. I don't know what union I, as a literary man, could join…I'm with organized labor, heart and soul, but a union can't help me. I want to unite with you.”[62] The co-operative movement made that union possible. By activating the collective purchasing power of socialists, the co-operative movement incorporated fellow travelers in the creative fields into a united stand against the social order. In the early days of *The Masses,* many of the contributors were Rand School associated writers and intellectuals. At the Rand School, they educated labor leaders and socialists, but as seen by Wood's comment, they felt estranged from traditional union organizing. Co-operation looked to close the gap by making these intellectuals and writers partners with laborers. The bonds that formed through co-operation came from more "than merely a sharing of opinions on philosophical subjects. They are tied together in these organizations by economic conditions."[63] Initially, *The Masses* forged a connection between radicals and the industrial working class, not through the cultural rejection of bourgeois middle-class values, but through concrete economic enterprises that all socialists could be directly involved in.

The Vlag era *Masses* regularly invoked the practical appeal of the co-operative movement. Vlag argued that “we Socialists realize we will never reach our ultimate goal unless we do something besides teaching philosophy in an abstract form… we must reach the workers through their stomachs as well as through their brains.”[64] As it existed socialism only offered workers a set of theoretical proposals. To counter this Vlag recommended creating socialist co-operatives that dealt in everyday goods like clothing and groceries. With no need to mark up

[62] Eugene Wood, *The Masses,* January 1911, 10.
[63] Vlag, *The Masses*, 9.
[64] Piet Vlag, “Why Socialists Should Join Co-Operatives,” *The Masses,* January 1911, 9.

their wares in the pursuit of profits, co-operatives would attract workers looking for better prices. From there the businesses would become an important part of workers everyday lives embedding the appeal of a socialist future in the most mundane but necessary exchanges. By making socialism more intelligible, the co-operative movement aimed to turn theory into reality.

Far from just an effective recruiting tool, the experience of running a co-operative, like taking part in a union, would teach workers the necessary organizational skills to make a successful movement. These enterprises could give "the worker what he needs most of all-organization: the power of working in comradeship without hitch or stumbling."[65] This organizational discipline would spread to the wider socialist movement adding "efficiency to the political and industrial campaign."[66] Working in co-operatives offered more than just an experience that aided the effectiveness of the movement in the present but also offered workers a glimpse into the possibilities of socialism. For all its practical appeal and utility, the most important part of the co-operative movement was that it gave workers in the present the experience of what the socialist future held. Those involved in socialist co-operatives lead "the New Life before the New Life has come."[67] Doing this made them see socialism as "the civilization of the future; a whole new existence whose edges at least he has tasted."[68] Like the more famous era it preceded, *The Masses* under Vlag articulated a distinct way of living the revolution that considered what role artists, writers, and intellectuals would play.

While less politically or artistically revolutionary, this period of *The Masses* still holds a valuable insight, revealing that from its inception the radicals who produced the magazine used it

[65] *The Masses,* September 1911, 5.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.

as a space to describe their ideal way of living toward the achievement of socialism. Like the models that came after it, the distinct historical period that Vlag, Seltzer, and others lived in, contributed to the co-operative movement's appeal. Early issues are full of references to the successes of the European co-operative movement. For example, Seltzer explained that "The history of co-operation in European countries has demonstrated its value, and there is no reason why a great co-operative cannot be built up here too, in as short a time as it was built up in Germany."[69] Even if the co-operative movement was relatively small at the time in the U.S. the European examples proved to them that the historical realities of the present made this a viable approach to building socialism.[70] Then, for them the socialist co-operative was not some far off dream but something that existed in the present.

A year after *The Masses* published its first issue, the Lawrence textile strike began in January 1912. The strike seemed to announce that history was outpacing the methodical reform-based model of co-operatives. That a group of female workers from a diverse pool of ethnic backgrounds held out against violence and intimidation by their bosses was an inspirational victory that co-operative grocery stores in Hoboken could not match. *The Masses* remarked that the Lawrence strike came from a "most extraordinary condition, indeed, when strikers will not even take notice of the most extreme violent measures against them, much less waiver in their demands."[71] Suddenly the Lawrence strike and the IWW that organized it offered a different and possibly more effective model for change. While still a firm believer in co-operatives, when

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[69] Thomas Seltzer, "Editorials," *The Masses*, January 1911, 3.
[70] Even at this phase *The Masses* was a magazine for an urban or New York audience separating them from cooperatives outside of the city. Many American cooperatives were in rural areas and part of the legacy of the Grange Movement and the Farmer Alliances. For more see Lynn Pitman, *History of Cooperatives in the United States: An Overview* (Madison: University of Wisconsin-Center for Cooperatives, 2018) https://resources.uwcc.wisc.edu/History_of_Cooperatives.pdf.
[71] "Editorials," *The Masses*, April 1912, 3.

discussing the IWW's idea of "One Big Union," Vlag criticized "Those co-operators who look upon their movement as a cure-all instead of considering it merely as a phase of emancipation of the working class."[72] To the younger socialists like Eastman, the reformism of the co-operative phase was over. The immediacy of workers' needs demanded revolt and rebellion like what the IWW had organized at Lawrence. Younger radicals would not wait for labor and purchasing power to meet in co-operative enterprises, instead, they would champion workers' efforts to take on capitalist exploitation directly.

If dramatic strikes restored the enthusiasm for direct confrontations with capitalism, the cultural revolt in Greenwich Village gave radicals a model of what a revolution could accomplish. The bohemian art and literature coming out of the Village helped to upend the Victorian culture of the past century. Politically minded radicals viewed this emerging artistic movement as a revolt against bourgeois standards. The realism of bohemian art revealed how older norms stifled creativity and obscured the exploitation and oppression at the heart of the current social system. With front row seats to these changes, *The Masses* after Vlag expressed a version of radicalism that viewed this cultural revolt as part of the overall movement toward socialism. With Eastman's arrival in December 1912, *The Masses* increasingly became the bridge between the cultural revolution in the Village and the militant unrest in the factories, creating a different notion of how to live a radical life.

Revolution: Action, Art, and Reality

In his memoir, Max Eastman recalled the mandate that came with his arrival as the new editor of *The Masses.* He explained that it "was easy to infer, from the nature of artists and the

[72] Ibid.

climate of opinion then prevailing in Greenwich Village, that anyone who took on the job could change the editorial policy from "reformist" to "revolutionary" with a turn of the hand."[73] This change was evident immediately. Co-operation and the co-operative movement receded completely from use, replaced by discussions of class struggle and the virtues of remaining open to both direct and political action. As for revolution, Eastman explained that "We mean a radical democratization of industry and society, made possible by the growth of capitalism, but to be accomplished only when and if the spirit of liberty and rebellion is sufficiently awakened in the classes which are now oppressed. A revolution is a sweeping change accomplished through the conquest of power by a subjected class."[74] *The Masses* then sided with that subjected class and used its pages to inspire "the spirit of liberty and rebellion." This made art and fiction a more organic part of the magazine then during the Vlag period. No longer just window dressing to attract readers to columns arguing for a specific approach to socialist organizing. Art, fiction, and poetry now took a more direct hand in instigating the emergence of this revolutionary spirit.

The connection between art, propaganda, and the revolution offered another answer to Eugene Woods' concerns about how those who worked in the arts could join with industrial laborers. For the Eastman *Masses,* "The hope of the class struggle lies not in the evolution of a pure proletarian majority, but it lies in the evolution of pure class consciousness in those who are proletarian. It lies not in the abolition of a real middle class, but in the abolition of a fictitious middle ground between the pure capitalist and the pure proletarian class."[75] Thus, the actual class position of those that supported socialism mattered less than the creation of clear battle lines with the interests of the elites on one side and the interests of the workers on the other. By creating art

[73] Max Eastman, *Love and Revolution*, 17.
[74] Max Eastman, "Knowledge and Revolution," *The Masses,* December 1912, 6.
[75] Max Eastman, "Statistical," *The Masses,* May 1913, 6.

that expressed or furthered the interests of the working class, artists contributed to the cause. It did not matter what segment of society they came from as long as they would be willing to fight with labor against capital.

The Masses featured art and journalism that documented the current injustices against the international working class and pushed for the eventual overcoming of the social world. As instigators toward the revolution, *The Masses* celebrated the connection between socialists and the future. Rufus Weeks poetically stated that "The Socialist heart which hungers for the music of the future must at times listen for notes floating down from the heights mankind is yet to climb, and take in those harmonies as if they were sounding now, thus creating a present joy out of the joy of the coming generations."[76] Similarly, Arturo Giovannitti described *The Masses* as "the recording secretary of the Revolution in the making."[77] Giovannitti who was both a poet and a labor organizer involved with the Lawrence strike in 1912, was the personification of *The Masses*' faith in direct and indirect agitation through protests and art. In turn, Giovannitti regarded *The Masses* as "a earnest and living thing, a battle call, a shout of defiance, a blazing torch running madly through the night to set afire the powder magazines of the world."[78] Even aside from the influence of bohemian free expression, *The Masses* constructed a vision of itself and socialism in general as harbingers of the future. The contributors to *The Masses*, whose work collectively made the magazine, believed it was a torchbearer for the revolution because they immersed themselves in militant strikes and cultural revolts which signaled the possibility for radical change all around them.

[76] Rufus W. Weeks, "Untitled," *The Masses*, March 1913, 16.
[77] Arturo Giovannitti, "What I Think of *The Masses*," *The Masses*, July 1916, 5.
[78] Ibid.

The sense of imminent revolutionary upheaval was one of the major factors that made the Eastman era *Masses* opposed to reform. Eastman argued that the goal of reform was to "assuage and obliterate the class struggle by means of literary evangelism and concessions on the part of those who hold the economic power."[79] It merely bought the ruling class time by offering marginal improvements delaying revolutionary action. This skeptical attitude toward reform made *The Masses* a frequent critic of progressive electoral efforts and Roosevelt's Progressive Party. One example of this comes from the labor lawyer and former progressive Amos Pinchot who lamented the failure of the Progressive Party stating "let us not blame those leaders of the party who are responsible for its present low state. They were no doubt working for what they believed to be the good of the community, but they were fighting for it foolishly and in the wrong place."[80] At another point, Pinchot described how "Under blind leadership, the party followed a shallow middle-of-the-road course…Carrying a withered and decidedly suspicious looking olive branch to labor and capital, and to democracy and oligarchy alike, it pleaded for universal approval. This plea was rejected."[81] For *The Masses,* progressive reforms, no matter how well-intentioned, made a fatal error by attempting to placate the social order for the betterment of all instead of directly representing the interests of the working class.

The Masses critique extended to political action in general. Politics alone could not bring about a social revolution and at best would only offer "social amelioration to be accomplished by the enlightened self-interest of the privileged…"[82] Eastman declared that "Anybody who talks about, "the power of the ballot" — if he really means a power to deprive the ruling class of their capital—is talking nonsense. A revolutionary vote would be nothing but a shower of confetti, if

[79] Max Eastman, "Knowledge and Revolution," *The Masses,* July 1913, 6.
[80] Amos Pinchot, "The Failure of the Progressive Party," *The Masses,* December 1914, 10.
[81] Pinchot, *The Masses,* 9.
[82] Max Eastman, "Knowledge and Revolution," *The Masses,* January 1913, 6.

it were not backed up by an economic force."[83] The force then came from strikes. A strike as an active expression of working-class power did more than bargain for concessions from elites. Instead, workers put their power in a confrontation with the power of the bosses. Yet, isolating these clashes from greater collective efforts limited their effectiveness. John Sloan's cartoon "Direct Action" showed this by depicting a group of striking workers huddled together in the snow outside of a factory with a menacing contingent of armed troops patrolling the perimeter.[84] In this case, the main result of direct action is not a rousing victory of labor over capital but the misery of workers trapped in the cold and threatened with violence. *The Masses* argued they could be critical of political action without presenting direct action as the perfect form of organizing. Socialists could not adhere to a dogmatic binary. Instead, the goal was to use strikes and political campaigns in tandem to cement working-class victories into a permanent change.

In principle, *The Masses* were nondogmatic and would use any means of aiding the class struggle. Eastman compared their approach to the boxer Jack Ketchel who "could fight out of his class because he swung both arms at once. He never spent any time arguing with himself about which to swing first…We recommend his example to the revolutionary movement."[85] Despite being aligned with the radical left this willingness to entertain politics as a useful tool placed *The Masses* in a middle position between the more mainstream socialist movement led by Eugene V. Debs and the Greenwich Village Anarchists symbolized by Emma Goldman. While keeping their revolutionary outlook and skeptical attitude toward reform, *The Masses* still supported progressive measures like women's suffrage, which opened the magazine up to Anarchist attacks from the left. Some of these came from Goldman herself. In her magazine, *Mother Earth*

[83] Max Eastman, "Knowledge and Revolution," *The Masses,* August 1913, 6.
[84] John Sloan, "Direct Action," *The Masses,* February 1913, 4. See Figure 1.
[85] Max Eastman, Knowledge and Revolution," *The Masses,* January 1913, 5.

Goldman claimed that it was "rather disappointing to find *The Masses* devoting an entire edition to the "Vote for Women." Perhaps…we alone believe women no longer need dolls; that women are capable and are ready to fight for freedom and revolution."[86] At the heart of this disagreement was *The Masses'* continued faith in democracy.

The Masses argued their revolution would not be at the expense of democracy but would instead take the form of an expansion of true democratic freedom. This expansion was impossible without the victory of the working class but was also the source of their anti-dogmatism. When discussing suffrage, Eastman described a true democrat as someone who recognized "the varieties of human nature. They recognize that each one of us has a unique problem to solve, and he or she must be made free to solve it in her own way. That is democracy. That is the liberty of man."[87] Like the magazine's tactical approach to political and direct action, individuals should never be subsumed or subordinated to a specific approach. This does not deny the reality of the class struggle or the necessary connection between the advancement of working-class interests and genuine democracy but instead demands that the condition of freedom depends on a variety of ways to approach that reality and necessity. From this, we can see that one of the core ideological principles of *The Masses* was that democracy was not just a byproduct of socialism but a fundamental aspect of reality. To live as a socialist meant to live freely. Eastman explained that "The purpose of life is that it should be lived. It can be lived only by concrete individuals… and they have concrete problems of conduct to solve. And though a million solutions must be generally proposed and praised in order that each may choose the true and wise one…they are futile…and absurd, if men and women are not free to choose."[88] The

[86] Emma Goldman, "Anti-Suffrage Papers Please Copy," From *Mother Earth* reprinted in *The Masses,* January 1916, 20.
[87] Max Eastman, "Who's Afraid: Confessions of a Suffrage Orator," *The Masses,* November 1915, 8.
[88] Max Eastman, "Towards Liberty," *The Masses* October 1916, 25.

ability to choose was an aspect of human nature, ingraining democracy into the reality of human existence.

Socialism and art would flourish only if people could freely engage in them. If both gave an outlet for representing the true nature of reality, they had to take forms that complied with it. In practical terms, this meant that socialist artists had to be free to create what they wanted. Creative freedom, like democracy, was not an end to a means but a means unto itself. This idea informed Floyd Dell's comments in a review of Bertrand Russell's *Political Ideals* that summarized the lessons and conclusions of the last few years. He explained that "We have lost some of our old confidence in the magic of economic determinism; we do not care to rely exclusively on the possessive instincts of the working class to bring about a happier world; rather, we wish to derive such political and social arrangements as will encourage the creative impulses in all mankind."[89] For Dell and others, Greenwich Village had been one such arrangement. Socialism then had the potential to universalize man's capacity not only for democracy but for creativity.

The Masses idea of revolution encouraged artists and writers to not only cultivate the spirit of rebellion among the working class but also to indulge in their creativity. The socialist revolution and the fair distribution of wealth that came with it would supply the material comforts making creative free expression the norm. A review of W.H. Davies *The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp* written by Irwin Granich discussed how capitalism limited free expression. Granich mourned the thought of "all the young men and women who are still in poverty, young men and women who are poets but have not yet found a voice, and upon whom

[89] Floyd Dell, "My Political Ideals," *The Masses,* November/ December 1917, 33.

the machine still squats, like the monster of a nightmare, ever and ever."[90] He then explained how "The intellectual proletariat is a new and tragic problem in the world. Formerly social protest was a physical reaction… But now with the infiltration of education there has risen a class of sensitive… young people, to whom drudgery is an inquisition, to whom monotonous day labor is a slow and burring death."[91] For Granich socialism promised to lessen the burden of work to its absolute minimum. The writers and artists of *The Masses* through the random luck of life arrived at a version of this freedom before the totality of society, and thus had a responsibility as both socialists and artists to advocate for the extension of this freedom to all.

The idea of liberating the working class not only from the exploitation of capital but also toward a creative realization of human artistic potential also appeared in Mary Isabelle Henke's poem "Brother of Poets," published in *The Masses.* In the poem, Henke takes on the character of a writer forced to toil in a factory instead of practicing their craft. The poem reads "I have no polite learning, that knows a little of many things. But I have the mind and soul of a poet. I have the Divine Spark."[92] This would be poet feels a powerful internal compulsion to write but his poverty forces him to spend every waking hour working to have the bare economic necessities. The poem concludes with the narrator reflecting on the death of a rich and famous artist. Unconcerned with wealth the worker sees the inherent value in creativity claiming "I wish I could write that beautiful thing before I die."[93] This argument was made again more directly by Eugene Wood who explained that "What hinders the development of music now is that the frost of poverty nips every bud almost that peeps out of the ground."[94] For Wood "One of the biggest

[90] Irwin Granich, "The Book of the Month," *The Masses,* October 1917, 30.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Mary Isabelle Henke, "Brother of Poets," *The Masses,* November/ December 1917, 41.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Eugene Wood, "Music and the Grand Bust-Up," *The Masses,* March 1913, 17.

results of the Revolution will be the world wide burst into song."[95] Along with the tragedy of poverty itself, both writers argued that capitalism impoverished the human spirit.

If the artists and writers of *The Masses* enjoyed the creative freedom that would belong to everyone after the revolution, it was not enough to simply create art, the character and quality also mattered. Free art would both speak to the real conditions of the world and reject the Victorian cultural standards that obscured that clarity in favor of bourgeois values. Creating art of this quality allowed for those in the present to put forward visions of the future. Eastman saw this reflected in the work of Isadora Duncan. He explained that "Duncan seems to have risen to create, in her language of motion, a poem of the children of the future-children of a time when life shall be both frank and free, and proceed under the sky with happy fearlessness of faith in the beauty of its real nature."[96] Not only art but socialism itself needed to be "as democratic in reality as that of the foreman and employers…"[97] *The Masses* then reflected "life as a whole from the socialist standpoint."[98] While the approaches or standpoints could vary the fundamental core of reality remained consistent. In another issue, Eastman explained that "The real world is a world in which privilege can only be uprooted by power. It is a world in which democratic progress has always and always will, come through the disreputable struggle of a lower class against the entrenchments of a nobility whose power is property and whose armor is respectability."[99] *The Masses* employed a style of art, writing, and politics that penetrated past the armor of respectability revealing the driving struggle of economic interests that defined reality. True art then, would always represent some aspect of reality, either the condition of class

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[95] Ibid.
[96] Max Eastman, "Is Truth Obscene," *The Masses,* March 1915, 5.
[97] Floyd Dell, "The Nag-itator," *The Masses,* November 1914, 19.
[98] "Editorial Notice," *The Masses,* December 1912, 3.
[99] Max Eastman, "Utopian Reality," *The Masses,* December 1916, 12.

struggle or the democracy at the core of human nature. To be in touch with reality, for *The Masses,* was the key to living the revolution.

That sense of reality was the standard *The Masses* used to critique Victorian cultural norms. These norms obscured "the hard and biting fact that economic self-interest is a dominating force in all history."[100] *The Masses* countered this by creating a unique form of modern art that was not avant-garde or experimental but realistic. Artists tried to capture life for working-class residents of New York. In his cartoon "Why don't they go to the Country for a vacation?" George Bellows depicted the cramped conditions of lower-class neighborhoods making the streets of New York into a sea of human activity [101] (Fig. 2). These snapshots of lower-class life could range from the tragic to the mundane but all of them portrayed lower-class

Fig. 2.

[100] Ibid.
[101] George Bellows, "Why don't they go to the Country for a Vacation?" *The Masses,* August 1913, 4.

people as victims of a corrupted social world that nevertheless kept their dignity despite their oppressive conditions. That dignity came from their direct interaction with harsh economic realities. At the same time, the caption makes the middle- or upper-class residents who would earnestly ask that question the punchline of the joke because of their separation from reality. As often as *The Masses* depicted the working class as authentic or real, artists depicted the bourgeois as blinded by their economic privilege and repressive Victorian ideals.

The connection between capitalism and Victorianism made *The Masses* opposed to conservative thinking in all forms. This made the church and all other sources of moral concern a regular target of *The Masses* satire. *The Masses* portrayed these moralists as hypocrites who used morality to justify their privilege and the naturalness of the inequality between the different classes and genders. One example comes from Maurice Becker who sketched a modern "last supper" featuring robust church officials smoking and dining in comfort, while an emaciated statue of Christ hung above them as an ignored signpost of the church's lost values [102] (Fig. 3). Another comes from John Sloan who drew a wealthy church congregation listening to their pastor. The pastor reminded his flock that "we see the masses filled with a vague unchristian spirit of discontent. They cry out

Fig. 3.

[102] Maurice Becker, The Last Supper," *The Masses*, December 1913, 4.

upon work bewailing their divinely appointed lot forgetful my brethren, of the heavenly law which ordains that only through toil and tribulation, by the narrow path of self-denial may we enter into the higher values of spiritual blessedness…"[103] The joke comes from the picture of the congregation both well-dressed and well-fed, clearly not denying themselves material pleasures.

Carl Sandburg's poem "Billy Sunday" from the September 1915 issue of *The Masses* was the most forceful condemnation of religious hypocrisy. Sandburg described the Christian establishment as a "bughouse peddler of second-hand gospel-you're only shoving out a phony imitation of the goods this Jesus guy told us ought to be free as air and sunlight."[104] This conduct was compared with Jesus who "played it different. The bankers and corporation lawyers of Jerusalem got their sluggers and murders to go after Jesus just because Jesus wouldn't play their game. He didn't sit in with the big thieves."[105] For *The Masses,* the church existed to further its power while excusing the injustice of society as a whole. Jesus, on the other hand, was a working-class radical who spoke to the injustices of the world. Art Young echoed this idea with his cover for the December 1913 issue. The cover featured a poster for a speech by Jesus. The post claimed Jesus as the "the workingman of Nazareth" who came to speak on "The Rights of Labor."[106] In the issue, Young argued Jesus "would to-day be one of the many traveling speakers proclaiming the message of industrial democracy."[107] *The Masses* interpreted Jesus as a working-

[103] John Sloan, "His Reverence: Thus Friends…" *The Masses,* December 1913, 12-13.
[104] Carl Sandburg, "Billy Sunday," *The Masses,* September 1915, 11.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Art Young, "Coming," *The Masses,* December 1913, 1.
[107] Art Young, "One of those Damned Agitators," *The Masses,* December 1913, 3.

class orator, thematically connecting him to contemporaries like Eugene Debs, who had an ability similar to great artists. Through words and agitation, they captured reality and motivated action against injustice.

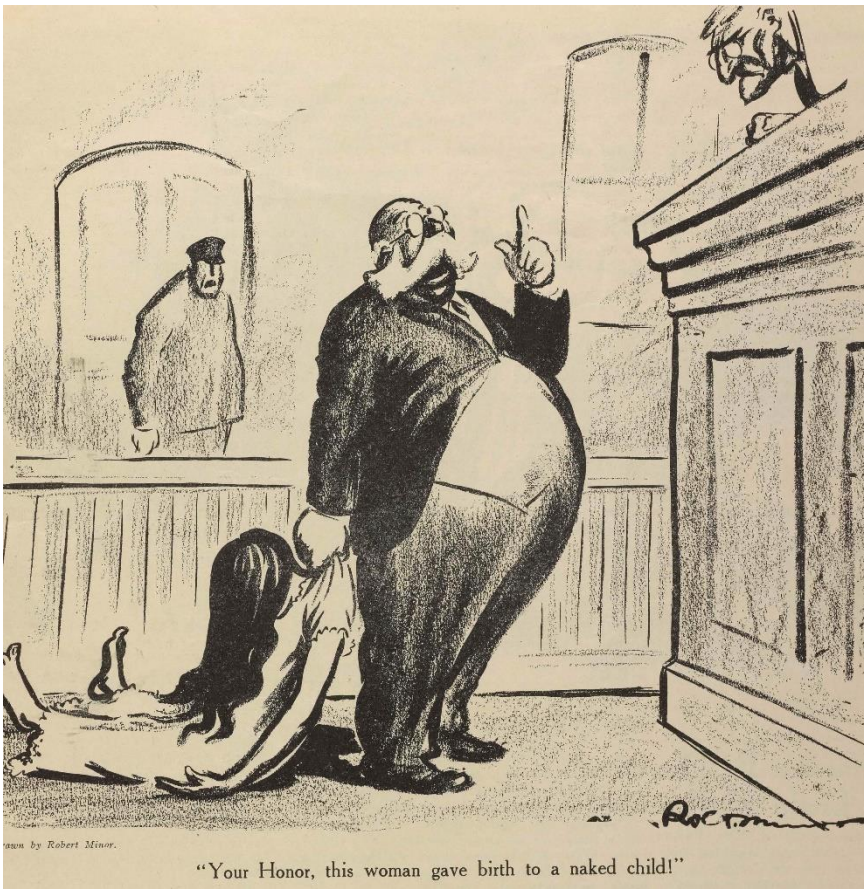

Fig. 4.

Even worse than the hypocrites in the church, *The Masses* treated anti-vice activists like Anthony Comstock as tyrannical zealots. Robert Minor's drawing from the September 1915 issue of *The Masses*, featured a cartoonish Comstock dragging a woman before a judge. In front of the judge, Comstock declared "Your honor this woman gave birth to a naked child!"[108] (Fig. 4). Another cartoon by Minor depicted Comstock in mid-swing striking against the naked female form.[109] While the organized church was corrupt it at least offered the model of Jesus as a position to both critique the church's conduct and as an example of a moral life. Comstock and other anti-vice crusaders merely struck against progress for women or artistic freedom, not using morality as a cover but as a weapon. The lack of any redeemable qualities caused Dell to recall how "In 1916 the infamous Anthony Comstock died and went to hell."[110] Along with their obvious enemies among

[108] Robert Minor, "This Woman…" *The Masses,* September 1915, 19.
[109] Robert Minor, "O Wicked Flesh!" *The Masses,* October 1915, 20.
[110] Floyd Dell, *Homecoming,* 278.

the elites, *The Masses* argued against moralists who they felt served those elite interests by attacking the free expression required for true art and the agitation of working-class leaders.

The Masses treated the bourgeois as hypocrites with their heads buried in the sands of moral tradition, but they still had to ask themselves how could people outside of the working class experience an authentic existence? The bohemian revolt in personal and cultural life answered. To residents of Greenwich Village, bohemianism was not only about creating art outside of traditional norms but also a radical rethinking of the relationship between men and women. The first step was to reconsider the ways the institution of marriage, like moral norms more generally, restrained individuals. Elsie Parsons explained how "Society, modern and primitive, stamps marriage with extraneous features, insists upon making of it a novelty, because society thereby controls it, or rather through marriage thus artificialized, it controls sex."[111] Similar to Comstock's ridiculous zealotry, Parsons argued that marriage constrained both men and women in the false name of the "good of society."[112]

Bohemian sexual attitudes then offered increased freedom, which had a liberating effect on those that took part in it. Floyd Dell's first piece of fiction published in *The Masses* titled "A perfectly good cat," supports this connection. In the story, Dell writes from the perspective of a young man who is staying with a quiet middle-class family. He described their existence as the kind of "quaint survival of that old-fashioned middle-class life which I, in my youthful cynicism, had imagined was extinct."[113] He continued describing the daughter Fannie as a person without "desires, no instincts, no unused energies to which such activities could minister… Look at her the blood of youth flowing in her veins! Yet no spark of discontent, no secret urge, no obscure

[111] Elsie Crew Parsons, "Marriage: A New Life," *The Masses,* September 1916, 27.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Floyd Dell, "A Perfectly Good Cat," *The Masses,* January 1914, 14.

longing to live…"[114] The story's twist occurs when the narrator visits a bohemian club that featured the trademark libertine interactions between men and women. He finds Fannie in attendance and describes her as "transformed, vitalized with pleasure. Presently she saw me, and the eyes which had been always sleepy flashed me a welcome."[115] For Dell bohemian sexual freedom could awaken the exciting energies of life from the tedium of middle-class existence.

Bohemianism gave *The Masses* a way of not only creating art that reflected the real condition of the world by dismantling Victorian norms but also an authentic lifestyle that nonworkers could directly experience. If class struggle was the necessary social agent of the expansion of democracy then free expression was the personal reflection of that expansion. So much of *The Masses'* work focused on the authenticity of the working class. The sexual revolution occurring among the bohemians in Greenwich Village promised an avenue of authentic expression for artists, academics, and writers as well.[116] Even Eastman, who to a lesser extent than Dell, embraced the identity of bohemian Greenwich Village, described sexual freedom as a vital part of living the revolution. In an editorial defending Margret Sanger and her husband, Eastman concluded that "we need not sing the songs nor dance the dances of a future race of children-frank and free… unless we are willing earnestly and openly to consider, and know, and make known to all, the wise control of the physical processes by which those children shall be brought into the world."[117] *The Masses* bohemian ideals made Sanger's campaign for birth control not only a means of alleviating the burden of children on an impoverished family but also a means to control the physical world thus increasing freedom. In a later issue, Dell

[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid, 15.
[116] Stansell describes how the "freedom of thought and action and the removal of the barriers between the sexes went hand in hand." See part four of the *American Modern* for more. Stansell, *American Moderns,* 225.
[117] Max Eastman, "Is the Truth Obscene?" *The Masses,* March 1915, 6.

imagined "in a not too distant future, a society so improved in its economic and social structure as to provide a wide range and unhindered freedom for serious mating."[118] He then described how “The woman of the future, who, filled with the joy of life, already blossoms among us can find no fit companion among men. When the modern man arrives, he will find a kingdom awaiting conquest. He will not be afraid of love.”[119] Like the middle-class daughter in Dell's short story, the sexual revolution could transform personal life and individual identity into something more joyous, free, and true.

The Masses then tried to live the revolution through two approaches. On the one hand, contributors created art, fiction, and journalism that articulated the centrality of economic interests and encouraged the allegiance of its readership to the working class. At the same time, *The Masses* held up reality as something obscured by Victorian morals and the structures that supported capitalism more broadly. Workers directly experienced harsh economic realities every day on the shop floor, but like with their creative potential, poverty and necessity kept them from developing class consciousness. Many of the short stories in *The Masses* focused on these workers who felt the weight of reality crushing them but saw no alternatives, blinded by the drudgery of their lives. One example comes from Adriana Spadoni’s short story "A Rift of Silence." In the story, the main character works in a slaughterhouse and Spadoni described how he could “feel the world outside waiting for its food. It was like a voracious monster never satisfied… Although one couldn’t see it, it was as real as the Russian Master. It was always there behind urging him on.”[120] Stories like this worked in conjunction with *The Masses* reporting on

[118] Floyd Dell, “The Book of the Month,” *The Masses,* April 1917, 26.
[119] Ibid, 28.
[120] Adriana Spadoni, “A Rift of Silence,” *The Masses,* February 1913, 13.

strikes. Unlike the tragic characters in fiction, workers struck against the monster of production and exploitation across the country.

Class struggle was the defining condition of modern life for *The Masses.* Strikes and other forms of collective resistance allowed workers to put this knowledge into action. Strikes were a direct form of agitation that produced "among capitalists that antagonism which is a seal of its truth."[121] The radicals behind *The Masses* had access to that same knowledge and could spread it as a way of supporting workers but they still longed for a model of action that offered them a confrontation with reality. This is the importance of bohemian free expression. It offered radicals a model of artistic standards and personal behaviors, that dismantled Victorian norms and made them catalysts of the future. A mirror image to Spadoni's story, *The Masses* published stories like Dell's "A Perfectly Good Cat" that described the transformative effect that occurs through contact with the bohemian lifestyle. What this bohemianism offered was the second half of *The Masses* conception of reality, focused on the democratic core of human nature.

Another example of this comes from John Reed's short story "Seeing is Believing." In the story, Reed writes as a friend of a middle-class man named George who becomes involved with a woman who embodies the bohemian free spirit. The differences between them threaten the relationship and George confronts the woman over her refusal to get a job. His lover dismisses the idea, explaining "Tried to get a job? Me? Why no... I don't want to work here. I want to see things. And oh, there are so many things to see and feel!"[122] As George listened to the woman explain her approach to life he experienced "the strangest, most irrational sensation…He seemed to look into a world whose existence he had never dreamed of- a world from which he was

[121] Max Eastman, "Knowledge and Revolution," *The Masses,* August 1913, 6.
[122] John Reed "Seeing is Believing," *The Masses,* December 1913, 16.

eternally excluded…"[123] Like the worker who lived with the sensation of economic exploitation at his back, the middle class could glimpse the true freedom of human nature through interactions with bohemianism.

Yet, tensions developed as some wondered if the desire for authenticity in life and in art overtook the commitment to the interests of the working class. Simply replacing one set of values for another risked the creation of models of behavior, based not on the economic and democratic reality of life but their subjective experiences. Radicals risked falling in love with their own lives as predictive models that were not intrinsically related to the current forces of reality but alienated from them. Eastman himself criticized the desire to create a philosophy of life. These philosophies were not based on experimentation but experience. He explained that these ideals "are real, to be sure, in the individual experience of the temperaments that appropriate them; but if ever we are to get forward towards a day of liberated experience for all temperaments, we cannot build upon any of these propositions which only express the intellectual emotions of a few."[124] Eastman's argument contradicts the idea of living a life that predicts and preemptively experiences the revolutionary freedoms to come.

Eastman later acknowledged this contradiction in his memoir explaining that he "was on principle opposed to the anarchistic flavor in the cult of Bohemianism. I was conscious of this… I fear, for after all I was a Villager… I enjoyed its free and easy mode of life. It was, in fact, the mode of life that I hoped, when we got rid of classes and class rule, would become universal."[125] As Eastman feared, the bohemian experience had led the radicals behind *The Masses*, including himself, to indulge their experiences as a predictive philosophy of life. If his argument was true

[123] Ibid.
[124] Max Eastman, "Towards Liberty: The Method of Progress," *The Masses,* September 1916, 29.
[125] Max Eastman, *Love and Revolution,* 4.

than the post-revolutionary freedoms, they believed were alive in Greenwich would not be a generalizable condition for the possibility of emancipation but an insular set of practices that applied to them alone.

Floyd Dell reflected on the insularity of the Village in his memoir. For him, the Village was a world apart and from inside it, they treated visitors like strange beings from another time. He explained that "We thought the Village morality better… Despite our fondness for some of these friends of ours in the outside world, we rather despised them, certainly felt scorn and pity for them. And we knew they envied us…"[126] Dell's idealization of his experience in the Village conforms to Eastman's critique of creating philosophies of life, based on specific experiences. Making models of behavior based on their experiences were doomed to eventual irrelevance. The predictive model of their life would always fail in the face of the randomness of history. Dell himself grieved the death of Greenwich Village in the pages of the *Liberator* claiming "But, alas! some rumor of this peace being spread among the barbarians to the north, they descended upon the place. They were as a plague of locusts, that left not one green thing. They destroyed the place utterly. The Greenwich Village that was, is no more."[127] The bohemian life they experienced in Greenwich Village proved to be historical and passed. Now irrelevant, radicals needed to adapt.

Eastman viewed Universality and democracy as synonymous. He explained that "It is our part, however, to point out that not the painting of any particular truths will distinguish the art of the future, but the freedom to paint them all- a freedom which carries untold possibilities and untold dangers."[128] In art like in life, democracy was the universal condition. But this insight

[126] Floyd Dell, *Homecoming,* 273.
[127] Floyd Dell, "Greenwich Village," *Liberator,* May 1918, 41.
[128] Max Eastman, "What is the matter with magazine art," *The Masses,* January 1915, 16.

placed *The Masses* in a difficult position. *The Masses* crowd tried to live the authentic life of the working class but did so free of the poverty that limited worker's self-expression. In the ecstasy of their relative freedom, they saw themselves as models for the future. But these models, rooted in individual experiences would always lack the universality that Eastman believed was a condition of democracy. The truth was that the bohemian path they had carved was historically specific and tied to a particular time and place. Despite all the values of this approach and how much it satisfied the needs of the radicals in the present, for Eastman, it could not transcend into the future.

It is this contradiction that explains how *The Masses* crowd traded their bohemian influence for bolshevism. If radicals should not create a philosophy of life, based on the "individual poetry of experience,"[129] Eastman suggested instead they should look toward science. He argued that "those who are gifted with the power to paint their thoughts in glory, even those gods and prophets, must prepare to kneel at the homely shrine of experimental science."[130] For Eastman science was not about predicting but instead was the "intellectual control of forces."[131] For the radical to act scientifically then meant acknowledging that "Time will be more creative than our imagination can be. New events, new conditions, new inventions, new ideas will enter the world in the next few years, and all our plans will have to be drawn anew. Our elaborate prospectus will be wrong by a billion to one probability."[132] Unknown to Eastman at the time in 1916, a new revolutionary model loomed on the horizon, one that had not successfully predicted a revolution but had effectively controlled the social forces of reality to create one. The radical model of living they collectively authored in *The Masses* could never stand up to the objective

[129] Max Eastman, "Toward Liberty," 29.
[130] Ibid, 29-30.
[131] Ibid, 30.
[132] Ibid.

and scientific standards Eastman believed in. Trapped in a contradiction of wanting to act on their radical knowledge but knowing that the model of action they desired would always be bound to experience and historicity and thus not a standard for a universal approach, the radicals behind *The Masses* gave into the promise of objectivity. They saw in the Bolsheviks experimental proof that their approach lacked.

Liberator (1918-1922)

As John Reed made his way to Russia in the fall of 1917, he struck up a conversation with some of his fellow passengers. With their steamship stuck in Halifax Harbor, Reed and the others exchanged stories in the ship's smoking room. Destined for Petrograd, the excitement over the Russian Revolution affected all his shipmates. Reed recalled how even a self-described Russian aristocrat, when asked what he made of the Revolution, proclaimed that "It was worthy of Russia."[133] The aristocrat despised democracies arguing their egalitarianism promoted mediocrity at the expense of true beauty. The bold radicalism of the Revolution, he believed, spoke to the Russian people's instinctive artistic character. If the Russians revolted for equality, then this spirit would push them beyond the bounds of any prior revolution. The aristocrat then proclaimed that the revolutionaries "made what the French call the… grand gesture."[134] The grandness of that gesture captured the imagination of radicals across the globe. While they watched as the Great War concluded, the sense that this unimaginable bloodshed symbolized the death of the old-world order, assured them of the importance of the Russian Revolution. What occurred in Russia under the Bolshevik leadership began a process that they believed would replicate itself across the globe.

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[133] John Reed, "A Letter From John Reed," *The Masses,* November and December 1917, 14.
[134] Ibid.

While Reed began covering the story that would make him one of the greatest chroniclers of the Bolshevik rise to power, Max Eastman enjoyed the free time that came with the closing of *The Masses.* Seemingly unfazed by the legal battle ahead of him over the end of *The Masses*, Eastman recalled how "the closing up of that little red brick office over on Greenwich Avenue, giving away the office furniture and selling the empty safe-well there was pathos in it, but I was glad to be free."[135] No longer tied to a tight publishing schedule and threatened with jail time over their earlier radical positions, many of the artists and writers involved with *The Masses* turned toward creative pursuits. Instead of heading to Europe to cover the War or the Revolution, both Floyd Dell and Eastman spent their time working on sidelined novels and contributing plays to the Provincetown Players, a collective of artists that included the famous playwright Eugene O'Neill.[136] The coastal getaway Dell enjoyed in Provincetown was an artistic reprieve from the deeply political atmosphere of New York City. But history intervened.

John Reed arrived in Petrograd and began writing. While Reed had dabbled in fiction and poetry, his absorption in the events and personalities of the Russian Revolution rekindled his journalistic spirit. The work he produced in Russia recalled his career-defining coverage of the Mexican Revolution for the *Metropolitan Magazine* in 1913. Despite the return to form of Reed's journalism, the repressive wartime atmosphere in the U.S. made his stories unpublishable in mainstream presses.[137] Yet, for Eastman, these stories' quality and exclusivity made them an invaluable asset. Still able to call on the resources needed to run a magazine and gifted with the story of a lifetime, Eastman and his sister Crystal raised the necessary funds and created the *Liberator.* Floyd Dell returned as associate editor along with other *Masses* mainstays like Art

[135] Max Eastman, *Love and Revolution,* 68.
[136] Floyd Dell, *Homecoming,* 298-299.
[137] Stansell, *American Moderns,* 318-319.

Young, Cornelia Barns, Boardman Robinson, and Louis Untermeyer. With Reed's columns, the *Liberator* was one of the few sources of information on the Russian Revolution for a leftist audience fascinated by the rise of the first socialist state. Enjoying notoriety from their access to Revolutionary Russia and the dramatic death of *The Masses,* the *Liberator's* circulation surpassed the early magazine's numbers in the first month.[138]

Despite featuring many of the same staff and contributors, the *Liberator* brought some significant organizational differences from *The Masses.* Max and Crystal Eastman owned the magazine outright and did away with the co-operative structure Eastman had always argued was ineffective. More traditionally ran, what contributors lost in collective control they made up in compensation for their work. Crystal received the highest salary and oversaw the day to day operations and fundraising for the magazine. Max Eastman continued to write editorials like he had in *The Masses* but freed from the drudgery of operational duties he split his time between the magazine and his writing career.[139] Eastman's editorials, Reed's reports from Russia, and Floyd Dell's book reviews made up the substance of most issues. If Reed's journalism was the beating heart of the *Liberator,* Dell's reviews worked as the magazine's brain. Increasingly influenced by Bolshevism, Dell's book reviews still echoed the freewheeling nature of *The Masses*. Traversing a wide terrain of subjects, Dell effortlessly moved from harsh criticisms of anti-Russian propaganda to theories about the importance of pleasure in poetry.[140] Overall the *Liberator* was more straightforwardly political than *The Masses.* Cartoons and poetry were still vital parts of the magazine, but the *Liberator* reduced the amount of fiction to make room for political essays and journalism.

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[138] Max Eastman, *Love and Revolution,* 73.
[139] Max Eastman, *Love and Revolution,* 86.
[140] Floyd Dell, *Homecoming,* 320-328.

Every month Reed's stories described in detail the successful first step towards an international socialist revolution. The example the Bolshevik model supplied was even more impactful given the harsh federal repression justified by the War. While Eastman, Dell, and Young, were themselves awaiting trial, the federal government arrested radicals around the country. These raids, arrests, and deportations especially affected the IWW. Authorized by the War to stop German agents within the United States, a labor union like the IWW with radical goals and high immigrant participation made a perfect target.[141] Most offensively was the arrest of Eugene V. Debs, the practical and spiritual leader of American socialism.[142] While the *Liberator* protested these abuses, the tenuous legal position of its editors made the first issues wary of directly criticizing President Wilson. While advocating revolution abroad, Eastman's editorials had a conciliatory tone towards Wilson despite his role in the hostile political environment.

Eastman framed the political compromise as consistent with their support for the Bolshevik's foreign policy goals. While Eastman stressed Wilson's allegiance to the capitalist order they hoped to overthrow, Wilson's vision for a peaceful post-war world overlapped with plans articulated by Trotsky and Lenin. Quoting Trotsky, Eastman explained that "America and Russia… may have different aims, but if we have common stations on the same route, I see no reason why we could not travel in the same car, each having the right to alight when it is desired."[143] While publicly maintaining that the magazine's cautious praise of Wilson was in line with international socialism, privately Eastman faced criticism from fellow leftists targeted by Wilson's government. For example, Eastman recalled Margret Sanger's disappointment that they

[141] Helen Keller, "In Behalf of the I.W.W.," *Liberator,* March 1918, 13.
[142] John Reed, "With Gene Debs on the Fourth," *Liberator,* September 1918, 7-9.
[143] Max Eastman, "Wilson and the World's Freedom," *Liberator,* May 1918, 21.

compromised instead of going "down with our colors flying."[144] Eastman stressed that their ability to spread the ideas and achievements of the Bolshevik government necessitated the compromises that kept the magazine in print. While Eastman found pragmatic excuses for the conciliatory editorial position, ideologically empowered by the Bolshevik's uncompromising success, this stance helped form tensions between John Reed and the magazine.

In his time in Russia, Reed was far from a passive observer. While covering the Revolution both Reed and his wife Louise Bryant built relationships with top Bolshevik officials. This gave them unprecedented access that aided their reporting but also endowed them with the responsibility of being the Bolshevik's representatives in the U.S. Eastman recalled how Reed "had given himself, and had been given by Lenin and Trotsky, the duty of organizing a genuinely American Bolshevik movement…"[145] Thoroughly dedicated to this mission Reed disapproved of the *Liberator's* editorial compromise with Wilson. Reed expressed this disapproval by resigning as an editor from the publication created to release his stories. In a letter to Max Eastman published in the September 1918 issue of the *Liberator,* Reed explained that he could not "share editorial responsibility for a magazine which exists upon the sufferance of Mr. Burleson [Wilson's postmaster general]."[146] While Reed's resignation was mostly symbolic as he continued to contribute pieces to the *Liberator,* it was representative of his transformed sense of political action. Empowered by his relationship with the Bolshevik leadership, Reed viewed himself as more than just a radical reporter but as a professional revolutionary.

Despite the politically expedient stance of the *Liberator,* Eastman, Dell, Young, and others still went to trial over the past infractions of *The Masses* in April 1918. Charged along

[144] Max Eastman, *Love and Revolution,* 70.
[145] Max Eastman, *Love and Revolution,* 106.
[146] John Reed and Max Eastman, "Two Letters," *Liberator,* September 1919, 34.

with the others but still in Russia, Reed missed their court date. In his absence, Eastman, Young, and Dell used their connections in the American socialist movement to convince the one-time Socialist party candidate for mayor of New York and labor lawyer Morris Hillquit to come to their defense. Given the dramatic political atmosphere of the moment, with hundreds of IWW members including Bill Haywood sitting in jail, Eastman and the others used the trial as a platform to passionately argue in defense of their radicalism. While the prosecution grilled Eastman consecutively over both the content of *The Masses* and his political beliefs, Art Young remained lackadaisical oscillating between sketching those involved and sleeping. In the *Liberator,* Dell depicted Eastman's performance and Young's attitude as reminiscent of a university course or debate instead of a federal trial.[147] Regardless of the character of the trial, the jury was deadlocked over whether to convict. Tensions flared and the pro-conviction jurors threatened to lynch one of the dissenters, arguing he was both a socialist and a German agent.[148] The judge declared a mistrial, and the former editors of *The Masses* temporarily celebrated their freedom while the government prepared to try them again.

By the time of the retrial, Reed had successfully snuck back into the country. His journey back home, motivated by a sense of duty and solidarity with the others, only heightened the drama around the trial. Only a month before, the federal government sentenced Eugene Debs to ten years in prison on similar charges. Considering this development, it appeared that the former editors of *The Masses* would face a similar fate. Starting in September 1918, Eastman and the others spent five days defending both their socialism and their criticism of the War. Lacking the counsel of Hillquit this time, Eastman played an even more central part of the defense. He spent

[147] Floyd Dell, "The Story of the Trial," *Liberator,* June 1918, 7-18.
[148] Max Eastman, *Love and Revolution,* 98.

the days and weeks leading up to the court date obsessively preparing his statements.[149] Upon taking the stand, Eastman launched into an extended speech. The performance paid off as once again the jury was unable to reach a unanimous decision. Unable to obtain a conviction for the second time, the prosecution dropped the charges.[150] Able to escape from the legal assault that severely wounded other parts of the socialist movement, the *Liberator* took a bolder stand against Wilson's government, relaxing into relative security, rare among the rest of the American left.

The *Liberator* thrived between 1919 and 1921. Reed's reports from Russia and his relationship with Bolshevik leaders made him the most influential American in the burgeoning communist movement. That he arrived back in the U.S. with an official position as an ambassador for the Bolshevik government separated Reed from other American radicals.[151] Also his reporting on the Revolution, exclusively featured in the *Liberator,* was so highly requested that the magazine published a separate pamphlet in 1919 of Reed's best articles. Before the completion of Reed's book *Ten Days That Shook the World,* the *Liberator* was one of the few sources for American radicals to find sympathetic portrayals of the Bolshevik government. Even outside the U.S. Italian communist Antonio Gramsci told Eastman that Reed's writing in the *Liberator* was his main source for learning about the Russian Revolution as it was happening.[152] At the same time, Max Eastman's performance at the second *Masses* trial, also published by the *Liberator* as a pamphlet, made him into a radical hero who emerged victorious from two bouts

[149] Ibid, 122.
[150] John Reed, "About the Second *Masses* Trial," *Liberator,* December 1918, 36.
[151] Max Eastman, "John Reed, Bolshevik Envoy to the United States- A Character Sketch," *The Evening Call,* February 1918, 3.
[152] Max Eastman, *Love and Revolution,* 138.

with the repressive Wilsonian state. Eastman and Reed's fame contributed to the *Liberator's* peak circulation rate of 60,000 readers, which was double *The Masses'* peak of 30,000.[153]

Every month a new issue defended the Russian government and Lenin, countering what Eastman viewed as slanderous lies published in mainstream news sources. The *Liberator* even criticized Robert Minor, one of their contributing editors, for publishing a negative piece on Lenin in another magazine.[154] They viewed Lenin as a revolutionary statesman of the highest caliber. Where other socialists and anarchists criticized the abuses and concentration of state power Lenin employed, the *Liberator* defended this as an unfortunate but necessary step to true democracy. The Bolshevik's dismissal and repression of the Constituent Assembly was not the usurpation of democracy for them, but the clearing away of bourgeois traditions that would replicate capitalist domination. Only by doing away with them through the temporary use of force could socialism and thus real freedom take hold. This faith in the Bolshevik model made the *Liberator* increasingly adversarial toward conciliatory voices within the socialist and labor movement. As the Bolsheviks had to repress other socialist parties to their right that wanted to work with the existing democratic system, the *Liberator* agreed that some of the greatest enemies of the revolution would come from their own side.

While *The Masses* was always to the left of the more mainstream socialist movement, this harsher estimation of rightwing socialists was one of the lessons of the Bolshevik's rise. An even easier target than more moderate socialists, the *Liberator* treated conservative labor leaders as the great traitors of the working class. While still opposed to them, bourgeois moralists were no longer one of their major satirical targets. Instead, Samuel Gompers, the leader of the

[153] Max Eastman, *Love and Revolution,* 78.
[154] Max Eastman, "Bob Minor and the Bolsheviki," *Liberator,* March 1919, 5.

American Federation of Labor, took Anthony Comstock's role as a favored target of ridicule. Where Comstock was comically robust, artists depicted Gompers shortsighted leadership through a ridiculously short stature [155] (Fig. 5). The *Liberator* regularly featured cartoons depicting a child-size Gompers betraying the laborers that trusted in his leadership on behalf of capitalists. The *Liberator's* international coverage further justified their hostility toward non-revolutionary elements among socialists and labor leaders. While *The Masses* always featured foreign reporting, the Bolshevik victory ignited the *Liberator's* faith in a truly international socialist movement. The *Liberator* paid special attention to Germany, celebrating the German socialist Karl Liebknecht. Liebknecht was a member of the German Social Democratic Party but led a leftwing split away from the Party over their opposition to the War. Sentenced to four years in jail as a dissident, Liebknecht was released in October 1918 as part of a general amnesty toward political prisoners, on the

Fig. 5

[155] Boardman Robinson, "If we're not careful…" *Liberator,* January 1921, 22. A good example of the *Liberator's* depiction of Gompers.

brink of the German Revolution. The collapse of the German Empire and the release of Liebknecht caused the *Liberator* to proclaim Germany as the next country moving toward socialism. Like in Russia competing governments formed as rightwing socialists supported creating a republican system with capitalist political parties, while leftwing socialists supported complete worker control.[156] Workers declared a general strike against the republic in favor of revolutionary socialism. In response to the uprising, the government authorized the use of extreme force by anti-communist paramilitary groups called the Freikorps. The paramilitaries tracked down Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, considered the two leaders of the uprising, and assassinated them. The *Liberator* commemorated Liebknecht on the cover of the March 1919 issue and reflected on this dramatic betrayal of revolutionary socialism authorized by moderate social democratic leadership.[157]

With the dual examples of the Russian and German Revolutions in mind, John Reed set out to remake the American Socialist Party in the Bolshevik image. If Russia showed the importance of revolutionary leadership, Germany proved the danger posed by moderate socialists that favored gradual reform over drastic change. Always in favor of revolution over reforms, nevertheless the fates of Liebknecht and Luxemburg encouraged an openly adversarial relationship towards the rightwing of the socialist movement. At the same time, government repression pushed some within the Socialist Party to call for moderated positions on key issues. Dissension grew among the left-wing of the Party leading to the expulsion of Bolshevik influenced state branches and ethnic federations of Russians, Ukrainians, and other Eastern European immigrants. Suspended from the Party these groups formed a separate Communist

[156] "Who's Who in the German Revolution?" *Liberator*, February 1919, 18-21.
[157] John Reed, "Liebknecht Dead," *Liberator*, March 1919, 16-19.

Party. The Communists called for a convention in Chicago in the summer of 1919 to rival the Socialist Party convention happening at the same time. Reed and some other leftwing socialists remained members of the main Party, hoping to take over the organization from the inside.[158]

Only a day into the Socialist Party convention and frustrated with the conservative leadership, Reed and other leftwing socialists walked out. While still in the same building as the other convention, they held an impromptu meeting and officially created a new organization called the Communist Labor Party. With the hope of capturing the main party dashed and the socialist movement broken into thirds, this new Party received the *Liberator's* support, partially because of Reed's involvement and partially because of Eastman's criticism of the other organizations. With the creation of the Communist Labor Party, Reed's role as a political organizer overtook his work as a journalist. His increasingly rare contributions to the *Liberator* spoke to his chaotic personal and political life.[159]

Reed spent much of his time back in the U.S. in and out of court, targeted as an agitator by a government committed to repressing Bolshevism at home and in Russia. Feverishly Reed divided his time between strengthening the American communist movement and turning his reports from Russia into a single complete volume. With his book finished and an ominous sedition charge hanging over his head, Reed fled to Russia in 1919. The journey was arduous, only able to travel illegally, and Reed's health deteriorated. After successfully reaching Moscow, Reed quickly turned around and headed back to the U.S., authorized by the Communist International to organize a united communist party. The journey home was even worse. Finnish authorities arrested Reed in March 1920.[160] Attempting to find Reed's local allies who helped

[158] Max Eastman, "The Chicago Conventions," *Liberator,* October 1919, 5-19.
[159] Eric Homberger, *John Reed* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990) 191-193.
[160] "John Reed alive in Finland," *Liberator,* July 1920, 11.

him get into the country, authorities beat and interrogated him until his release at the end of June. Unable to move forward, Reed once again headed to Russia. Splitting his time between Petrograd and Moscow, he continued to work at an accelerated pace despite his poor health. His hospitalization in September interrupted his planned return to the U.S. Reed passed away a month later in October 1920.[161]

Reed's death shocked the *Liberator's* staff and the American socialist movement more generally. Already a respected writer and political organizer, Reed's burial at the Kremlin and Lenin's personal endorsement of his work, made him the first American martyr in what socialists saw as a looming international revolution.[162] The *Liberator* treated Reed like America's own Liebknecht or Luxemburg, heroes cut down in their prime. After his death tributes poured into the *Liberator* including a series of articles by Louise Bryant which helped to ingrain Reed's revolutionary image among American radicals.[163] A short book published by the old *Masses* contributor and muckraking journalist Lincoln Steffens about Reed reiterated his legacy. Steffens concluded that for Reed "death in Moscow must have been the most wonderful thing in the world: a vision of resurrection and the life of man."[164] Made a legend by his death, the magazine created to publish Reed's stories regularly invoked his memory but also brought in new contributors to make up for the loss of his talents.

While the possibility of international revolution dominated the content of the magazine's first years, the *Liberator* did not ignore cultural changes occurring closer to home. If the Village

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[161] Louise Bryant, "Last Days with John Reed," *Liberator*, February 1921, 11.
[162] The 1922 edition of *Ten Days That Shook the World* featured an introduction written by Lenin. Eastman also recalled that in his visit to Russia in the 1920s his reputation as Reed's editor gave him access to the upper levels of the Russian state.
[163] Louise Bryant, "Last Days with John Reed," *Liberator*, February 1921, 11.
[164] Lincoln Steffens, *John Reed: Under the Kremlin* (Chicago: Walden Book Shop, 1922) 14.

housed the most exciting artistic scene of the 1910s, that energy moved uptown into Harlem in the 1920s. The wave of talented writers and poets associated with the Harlem Renaissance made the *Liberator* more sensitive to African Americans than *The Masses* had been. While in principle *The Masses* supported full racial equality and the unity of white and black workers, cartoons or articles about African Americans played into racial assumptions about docility and backwardness. One of the most striking examples was John Sloan's cartoon "Race Superiority," which featured an African American child happily eating watermelon while sitting on a fence with a defeated looking white family trudging up the road behind him.[165] With the majority of African Americans living in the rural south, the New York based *Masses* had significantly less contact with them compared to Italian or Jewish immigrants who they treated more sympathetically. Where women and ethnic minorities often contributed to the magazine and even served as editors, African Americans were completely absent. But in the aftermath of the War, with African Americans moving to northern cities in record numbers, demographically and culturally the leftist intellectuals involved with the *Liberator* opened themselves to the cultural products coming from Harlem and the distinctness of African American political needs.[166] Unlike *The Masses*, the *Liberator* featured art and poems by African Americans and not just about them.

The *Liberator's* first encounter with the emerging literary scene in Harlem was Dell's critical review of a book of poetry published by NAACP organizer James Weldon Johnson. In many ways Dell's critique continued to reflect unchallenged racial assumptions, for example he

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[165] John Sloan, "Race Superiority," *The Masses*, June 1913,

[166] Only a few months before his death Reed gave a speech at the Second Communist International about the plight of African Americans. Reed described the recent demographic changes with blacks joining the industrial workforce in Northern cities. He advised communists to support racial equality in unions and within the Communist Party. For more see Communist International. *Minutes of the Second Congress of the Communist International.* July 25, 1920. https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/2nd-congress/ch04.htm#v1-p121

felt Johnson's prose had deliberately downplayed the "inherent rhythms" of African Americans speech. But when Johnson responded to Dell, the *Liberator* published his defense and set up an amicable relationship with the poet. With the exchange revealing the *Liberator's* racial blindness, a few months later the magazine published an article by Johnson describing the emerging racial consciousness of African Americans.[167] This new racial identity made the radicals across town more aware of African American culture and life as a construction of blacks themselves.

While never to the same extent the *Masses* embraced feminism, the *Liberator's* increased focus on African American writers showed how Civil Rights was an emerging political issue outside of the class reductionist view held earlier. More than just adjusting their own racial assumptions and prejudices, in 1919 the *Liberator* contributed to the black literary scene when it published a poem by a Jamaican writer named Claude McKay. The poem "If We Must Die," made McKay into an overnight literary sensation. Without ever directly mentioning race or racism, McKay's poem was an ode to militancy, exclaiming: "What though before us lies the open grave? Like men we'll face the murderous cowardly pack, pressed to the wall, dying, but-fighting back!"[168] To observers across the country, the attitude of McKay's poem personified the "new spirit of race militancy…" coming out of the Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro movement.[169]

For the *Liberator,* still looking to replace Reed as a major contributor and move in a more literary direction, McKay was a godsend. McKay moved from Jamaica to the U.S. to attend

[167] James Weldon Johnson, "What the Negro is Doing for Himself," *Liberator,* June 1918, 31.
[168] Claude McKay, "If We Must Die," *Liberator,* July 1919, 21.
[169] Tyrone Tillery, *Claude McKay: A Black Poet's Struggle for Identity* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992) 35.

Kansas State and after graduating moved to New York to pursue his dream of being a writer. He had a relationship with Greenwich Village going back to 1917 when *The Seven Arts,* a literary magazine next door to *The Masses,* published two of his poems. McKay remembered being a fan of *The Masses* but had never been able to get a piece approved for publication.[170] In 1919 he was personally introduced to Max and Crystal Eastman and built a strong friendship with Max especially. He became a regular contributor, publishing racially aware poetry, literary reviews, and essays on political issues like Marcus Garvey's movement and Sinn Fein in Ireland.[171] By 1921 McKay became an editor, joining other new talents like Michael Gold and Joseph Freeman.[172] Where the *Liberator* gained a talented writer, McKay felt his recognition by a group of overwhelmingly white intellectuals and artists offered a path to more universal appreciation outside of the African American literary community.[173] His career aside, McKay's politics placed him on the radical edge of the cultural movement in Harlem. His Marxism and background made him natural allies with fellow Afro-Caribbean writer Cyril Briggs. McKay joined Briggs semi-secret African Blood Brotherhood and used the *Liberator's* office to hold meetings. The hope was that sharing the same space as one of the prominent socialist publications in the country would connect black and white radicals together. In fact, long time cartoonist Robert Minor attended Brotherhood meetings and advocated for the organization's goals at Communist Party functions.[174]

While creatively the *Liberator* continued to enjoy an influx of talent, some editors became dissatisfied with Eastman's leadership. The earlier arrangement between Max and

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[170] Claude McKay, *A Long Way From Home* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007) 28.
[171] Claude McKay, "Garvey as Negro Moses," *Liberator,* April 1922, 8. And Claude McKay, "How Black Sees Green and Red," *Liberator,* June 1921.
[172] Max Eastman, *Love and Revolution, 220-225.*
[173] Tyrone Tillery, *Claude McKay,* 41.
[174] Tyrone Tillery, *Claude McKay,* 49-53.

Crystal was complicated by Crystal's health issues in 1921. As Crystal restricted her involvement with the magazine, Max continued to serve as an absentee executive editor, leaving others responsible for the daily operations. Unhappy with the arrangement, new editor Mike Gold, who had contributed to *The Masses* under his birth name Irwin Granich, called for Eastman's resignation. In an ironic reversal of John Sloan's revolt during *The Masses* period, Gold argued that Eastman's frequent absences hurt the quality of the publication. Gold also had a competing idea of the *Liberator's* purpose. An early advocate of proletarian literature, Gold believed the magazine should not just write about the working class but invite the working class to write about itself. Eastman, eager to step away and devote more time to his career, arranged along with Crystal, to sell their controlling shares. Crystal's health removed her from involvement with the magazine all together and Eastman became a regular contributing editor. In 1922 Mike Gold and Claude McKay became the joint executive editors and increased the magazine's focus on fiction and poetry.[175] But without Eastman's fundraising connections, the *Liberator's* ability to run independently was repeatedly tested.

The Science of Revolution: Bolsheviks, Prisoners, and Assurance

In *The Masses*, Eastman articulated a theory of reality based on the existence of class conflict as a fixed social problem inherent to capitalism. At the same time, people had to be free to approach this problem, and all problems, in a variety of ways. No single approach would suit every individual and every situation. The belief in one solution above all others made one a dogmatist, someone who denied the freedom inherent in human nature. As such, *The Masses* version of radicalism tried to balance a fixed social reality, defined by class struggle, with the

[175] Max Eastman, *Love and Revolution,* 265-272.

free individual. This made the bohemian artist their main model of radical identity. The quality and integrity of the artists' work depended on them shedding Victorian standards that obscured the class domination of the workers. By doing this, their work would be honest representations of the world but also creatively or freely designed by an individual. In short, art, of a certain quality, produced harmony between the defined society and the undefined individual.

This harmony was short-lived. Historical circumstances soon revealed how limited bohemian radicalism was in its ability to change social reality. At the same time, the slaughter produced by the World War, and the Red Scare that followed in its wake, convinced radicals to take decisive revolutionary action to avoid even greater ruin. In his lecture "Democracy and Revolution," published in the *Liberator*, Bertrand Russell argued when compared with feudalism, capitalism appeared as an advantageous system for human freedom. Thus, capitalist erosion of the feudal world was both positive and necessary. But, in the aftermath of the World War, which signaled the end of the last feudal monarchies in Europe, Russell concluded that "every step in the victory of capitalism over the past has made it more hostile to the future and less liberal."[176] The persistent failure of capitalism to fulfill its liberal promises, Russell explained, was apparent at every level of society. State repression made a mockery of democracy while plutocratic control of both industry and the media restrained workers and the middle class alike. Russell concluded that "Capitalism has failed to secure freedom, genuine democracy, stable peace, or the increased production that the world needs, and there is no reason to think that its failure in these respects is in any way temporary… What has Socialism to offer in these respects?"[177] This was the defining question of the era for the *Liberator*. In the face of

[176] Bertrand Russell, "Democracy and Revolution," *Liberator*, May 1920, 11.
[177] Russell, *Liberator*, 12.

capitalism's breakdown, they argued that socialism could no longer serve as a theory or moral perspective but instead as a call to revolutionary action.

If these historical circumstances influenced a new conception of how to live the revolution among the contributors to the *Liberator,* those circumstances also brought down a number of other similar magazines, leaving the *Liberator* as one of the few publications still attempting to be at the progressive edge of art and politics. The Post Office and the New York Vice squad continually targeted one of *The Masses* longest running and most famous contemporaries, Margaret Anderson's *The Little Review.* Anderson created the magazine at first to capitalize on the burgeoning Chicago literary scene but moved to Greenwich Village in 1917. In New York Anderson started a friendship with anarchist and occasional *Masses* critic Emma Goldman. Influenced by Goldman, the magazine advocated for anarchism, though *The Little Review* never became as overtly political as *The Masses.* Like other subversive magazines, the Post Office seized a 1917 issue because of a story with anti-war themes. Even after the War, repression intensified when Anderson published selections of James Joyce's novel *Ulysses.* More than the magazine's brief flirtation with anarchism, the Post Office declared Joyce's novel obscene and refused to mail issues of *The Little Review* in 1921. After losing an obscenity trial that banned *Ulysses* in the U.S., injunctions against *The Little Review* forced it to moderate itself to continue running.[178]

While *The Little Review* continued until 1929, war time threats and the deportation of Goldman effectively repressed its political content. Also, after the obscenity trial in 1921, even the featured literature was less radical. Other magazines from that era like *The Seven Arts,* started

[178] Mark S. Morrison, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001) 133-136.

by the writer James Oppenheim at a party in the Village, only survived for a single year. Created in 1916, *The Seven Arts* featured work from famous contributors like Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, and *Masses* staple Louis Untermeyer. What separated the magazine from other similar literary journals was Randolph Bourne. A student at Columbia like Eastman, Bourne was a vibrant intellectual that made his reputation defending left-progressive ideas in *The New Republic.* When the U.S. entered the World War in 1917, Bourne was its most eloquent critic. Unable to publish his ideas in the mainstream press, Bourne turned to *The Seven Arts.* Celebrated by other anti-war activists, *The Seven Arts* struggled to reach beyond that audience and folded that same year.[179] Bourne passed away in 1918 ending any chance that the magazine could come back in a different form. Oppenheim honored Bourne with a poem published in the *Liberator* a year after his death.[180]

As both examples show, radical magazines struggled to remain both politically and artistically uncompromised. Under a microscope of state observation and always pressured to remain financially feasible, magazines either failed or survived only by reducing their subversive qualities. That Eastman and the other editors had a stable enough base of support to rebrand as the *Liberator* and then were able to successfully defend themselves in two separate trials over the content of the earlier magazine, gave them both continuity and a fresh start.[181] As much a product of luck as capable leadership, by the 1920s the *Liberator* was one of only a handful of publications that could connect itself with the cultural revolt of the 1910s while still pushing a radical political agenda that fit into the environment of the present. As a publication the *Liberator* was a stylish inheritor of bohemianism, even if the editors moderated some of the more

[179] Stansell, *American Moderns,* 329-331.
[180] James Oppenheim, "Randolph Bourne," *Liberator,* February 1919, 14-15.
[181] Eastman, *Love and Revolution, xx.*

provocative tendencies, that repackaged itself to first spread news about and then defend the international Bolshevik revolution. The artistic excitement readers focused on the cultural revolt of *The Masses* transferred over to the political excitement at the Bolshevik state in the *Liberator*. The move in emphasis from culture to politics caused radicals like Eastman and Dell to reconsider the best way of living the revolution.

The creative engagement with life that revealed the persistence of class struggle and the necessity of freedom, articulated in *The Masses,* lost its relevance in the face of these concerns. While Dell and Eastman continued to believe the promises of Village life reflected what life under socialism would be like, it only represented the future, with no means of beginning the transformation towards it in the present. Summarizing the experience of being a radical Eastman explained that "Sometimes it seems that all we are doing-we who call ourselves radical or revolutionary-is continually putting ourselves at the point of view of posterity. By some peculiar impulse of imagination, we insist upon seeing the present as others will see it when it is past."[182] While radicals could live following their sense of the future, which in turn would influence the movement toward that different world, the pace of world events demanded an accelerated rate of action. In the wreckage of the World War, the revolutionary opportunities that radicals hoped to take advantage of no longer required a projected future perspective but an active engagement with the present facts. Eastman argued this engagement would come from a scientific attitude that focused on controlling the existing social forces and compelling them toward radical change. As the bohemian cultural revolt supplied the characteristics for their artistic radicalism, the Bolsheviks would supply the characteristics for their scientific socialism.

[182] Max Eastman, "Lenin- A Statesman of the New Order," *Liberator,* October 1918, 28.

The emphasis on socialism as a scientific attitude made the *Liberator* critical of radical's artistic outlook. The *Liberator* argued that anarchism was especially guilty of this tendency. In an editorial, Eastman responded to anarchist's criticisms of Lenin's use of state power claiming that "Anarchism is a natural philosophy for artists. It is literary, not scientific- an emotional evangel, not a practical movement of men."[183] For Eastman anarchists artistic qualities came from their resentment of organization. Individuals and freethinkers, nevertheless anarchists' vigilance against power and hierarchy could only tear down social systems. Socialists, on the other hand, desired to dismantle and then reorganize society.

Dell elaborated on this further explaining that anarchism held a "neurotic attitude toward organization."[184] He continued, describing how he suffered from the same condition and redefined it as "artistic." Artists desire for creative freedom naturally drove them against collective organizations that stifled their individuality. While this attitude was ideal for the leading spirits that created exciting new ideas or creations, in collective arenas like politics it obstructed the will to decisive action. The artistic attitude would be unable to compromise with others involved in collective projects and with the practical needs of a given situation. Like Eastman, Dell viewed this as the cause of the anarchist's denouncements of Lenin's dictatorial control. He argued that if anarchists refused to accept these measures as a means to an end and "if they want peace on earth and no policemen the day after the Revolution, they will have to show us more convincingly than they have yet been able to do how that happy condition may be achieved."[185] More nuanced than Eastman's attack, Dell acknowledged his indulgence in the artistic attitude while also stressing that their position was preferable. In an ideal situation, the

[183] Max Eastman, "Bob Minor and the Bolsheviki," *Liberator,* March 1919, 6.
[184] Floyd Dell, "The Road to Freedom," *Liberator,* May 1919, 42.
[185] Floyd Dell, *Liberator,* 43.

creation of a socialist society would not need war, arrests, and political repression. But the ideal world did not exist and a defining trait of socialism as science was to interact with the world as it is, not as it should be.

In another essay titled "A Psycho-Analytic Confession" Dell explained how the artistic attitude resulted in the privileging of personal experiences, ideas, or morals above pragmatic action. The essay, written as an argument between Dell and his unconscious, begins with Dell describing how his unconscious was driven solely by pleasure. From that point what starts as a discussion between Dell and an anarchist friend over Russian efficiency leads to the realization that Dell's friend is his unconscious. Once again Dell, even though he objects to it, relates a purer nonrational or emotional part of himself with the artistic attitude. In the case of the coming revolution, Dell explained how " as long as the Co-operative Commonwealth was a long way off, and we could imagine it to be anything we liked, my Unconscious was all for it… But as it comes nearer, and we can see its initial stages in all their realistic detail, my Unconscious begins to protest. Communism begins to look too much like work."[186] During *The Masses,* the radicals involved were able to live the revolution as bohemian socialists, enjoying the freedoms of the future while advocating for a collective revolution that would give those freedoms to each individual, because the revolution itself was still an abstraction. For them, the socialist revolution was a discontinuous break from the "unjust" present to the "just" future.

After the Russian Revolution, this view was impossible because they saw the messy continuity of reality, as the development of socialism in Russia underwent changes and periods of transition. From afar these changes appeared to vindicate Eastman's earlier critique of

[186] Floyd Dell, "A Psycho-Analytic Confession," *Liberator,* April 1920, 15.

experience. The Bolsheviks' success did not come out of a philosophy of life. Instead they succeeded because they approached each new task like a scientist, adapting and testing new courses of action. The *Liberator,* driven by the miracle of Bolshevik victory and Eastman's interpretation of it, constructed a new means of living the revolution not based on free-expression and creativity, but scientific methods applied to political questions. This cost the *Liberator* the earlier harmony between their political and artistic desires. The artistic attitude was unsuited for the reality of concrete political action because it placed ideal concerns above practical facts.

Eastman had advocated for socialism as a scientific attitude that favored universality, experimentation, and engagement with the actuality of the world as early as 1916. But it was the Bolshevik success and projection of these traits onto Lenin and Trotsky, that confirmed this argument for the larger group of radicals behind the *Liberator.* While Eastman's thinking was consistent, that the rest of the *Liberator's* staff adopted these ideas as well was because of the displayed weakness of the non-Bolshevik left. Government repression and the marginalization of American socialists only made Bolshevik's relative strength more appealing. At the same time the commercialization of bohemianism and the Village raised new concerns among radicals about the ability of culture to meaningfully subvert capitalism. Looking on in disgust, Dell argued that all their work making the Village into a microcosm of a freer world actually resulted in the creation of a new neighborhood that was a trendy investment for the city's elites.[187] In short, historical experiences made the bohemian model of radicalism, that was already the subject of doubt, less plausible at the same moment the Bolshevik one offered a successful experiment in achieving revolutionary social change. Now supplied with the Bolshevik's data,

[187] Floyd Dell, "Greenwich Village," *Liberator,* May 1918, 40.

radicals across the globe needed to embrace the scientific attitude, testing and applying Lenin's revolutionary methods in their respective countries.[188]

This line of thinking informed the *Liberator's* adoption of the Bolsheviks as a new radical model for living the revolution. The *Liberator* treated Lenin especially as more than just an inspiring leader but as a new kind of statesman. Eastman described how Lenin's scientific attitude gave him "freedom from fixations of the mind and emotion…" and also made him unlike other socialists because he could "think in a concrete situation."[189] For the *Liberator* ideology obscured one's access to the concreteness of reality. Moral and intellectually abstract arguments were the stock and trade of other political leaders, the rhetorical tools that they used to hide the economic interests and class domination behind bourgeois governments. On the other hand, the Bolsheviks were "men with a scientific point of view- no doubt the first that ever sat in seats of power. That is why they conquer without ammunition, and ten words of theirs sneaked into a press dispatch refutes the rhetoric of all the great editors and special writers combined."[190] The *Liberator* heralded the Russian government's continued existence, in the face of both international hostility and civil war, as a testament to the awesome power of their scientific approach.

The valorization of Bolshevik pragmatism was also politically expedient for the *Liberator.* Lenin's violent rise to power and disbanding of the Constituent Assembly in favor of a dictatorship of the proletariat received criticism not only from the capitalist press but also from

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[188] Christopher Phelps *Young Sidney Hook* examines another Dewey influenced Marxist. Hook and Eastman had a series of debates between the late 20s and earlier 30s over which of their pragmatically influenced interpretations of Marx was better. Phelps explains that Dewey viewed Eastman's idea of science and the professional revolutionary as essentially elitist, more inline with technocracy than a traditional pragmatic objection to dogmatism. For more see Christopher Phelps, *Young Sidney Hook: Marxist and Pragmatist* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997) 96-100.
[189] Max Eastman, "Lenin- A Statesman of the New Order," *Liberator,* October 1918, 28.
[190] "Editorials," *Liberator,* May 1919, 5-6.

other socialists and anarchists. Despite this, the *Liberator* recorded that Lenin was "a democrat by nature…"[191] The *Liberator* described that what Russian critics called undemocratic expressions of power were merely expedient manifestations of the popular will. They argued that the state existed to enforce class domination, as seen by the arrests and deportations of socialists and anarchists in the U.S. authorized by Wilson's government. Lenin used state power in the same way but against the bourgeois instead of on their behalf. Even more important than the motivating agency behind state power, the *Liberator* argued that Lenin's dictatorship was a legitimate response to the series of political crises and counter-revolutionary activity against the Revolution. The resistance from both the overturned monarchical and capitalist orders would not last in the face of the liberated society the revolutionary government was creating. Thus, state repression were temporary measures momentarily used against hostile forces both at home and abroad in the name of securing true democracy. Unlike the bourgeois state, that also used repressive political power, the Bolshevik's represented the interests of the majority, meaning once they defeated the formerly empowered minority, concentrated state power would recede given that the class conflict was over.

The *Liberator* excused repressive uses of power as necessary at this stage of building socialism. The ends justified the means, making "evangelical socialists" that put ideals before the complex political reality of revolutionary upheaval, enemies to political action. The *Liberator* equated criticism of the Bolsheviks actions with a detached political stance, primarily interested in socialism as an intellectual pursuit. Even Bertrand Russell, despite being a passionate defender of liberal freedoms, argued for the necessity of the Bolshevik course of action. In the *Liberator,* Russell described how ideas went through three phases on the path from abstract to practical

[191] Max Eastman, "Lenin- A Statesman of the New Order," 31.

form. The first phase was humanitarian, aimed at persuading others based on moral arguments. After that an idea became militant, hardened through opposition and assured of its eventual victory. In the last stage, as the idea takes power, it becomes cruel to keep its position. For Russell, Lenin's leadership signaled that socialism had arrived at this second militant phase. He explained that in this form socialism would lose "much of its attractiveness for certain types of mind. There are those who feel acutely the evils of the existing world and desire ardently the existence of a world free from these evils, who yet shrink from the stern conflict which is involved in getting rid of them. I confess to -a very strong sympathy with such men."[192] While continuing to believe that the struggle against capitalism was necessary to build a peaceful and democratic world, Russell's sympathy reflected his fear that prolonged violent conflict, like what was occurring in Russia, would result in a form of socialism stripped of its emancipatory potential and only able to persist through violence. Like a scientific experiment, Russell argued that he could only evaluate Lenin's dictatorship through its outcomes, by its ability to secure socialism's victory and then wither away toward greater freedom.[193]

Russell's lecture was one of the rare critical evaluations of the Bolshevik's featured in the *Liberator,* and later Eastman would attack Russell after he published a harsher criticism of Lenin following his visit to Russia, but his argument reflected the *Liberator's* view of their Bolshevism. Russell explained that the Bolsheviks provided an invaluable service to socialism as a global movement by proving it could exist outside of the realm of intellectual persuasion. Thus he felt that "Socialists throughout the world should support the Bolsheviks and co-operate with them."[194] But he stressed that the Bolshevik path was unique to the Russian context and given the

[192] Bertrand Russell, "Democracy and Revolution Part 2," *Liberator*, June 1920, 24.
[193] Bertrand Russell, "Democracy and Revolution," *Liberator,* May 1920, 12.
[194] Ibid.

immense struggle they had to undergo, as well as the likelihood that struggle would produce a dictatorial state as the only means of staying in power, this path should not be replicated by socialists in other countries. Socialists should learn from the Bolsheviks by adopting their scientific spirit and their will for action, but those actions would have to match the distinct context socialists worked in. The *Liberator* followed this logic and despite often verging on open hero-worship of Lenin, crafted an open definition of Bolshevik radicalism suited for the U.S.

While the *Liberator* used Bolshevik to refer to Lenin's government, it also used the word interchangeably with the scientific socialism they advocated for. In an issue of the *Liberator*, Reed ridiculed the American presses improper definitions of the word, explaining that Bolshevism was "not Anarchism, it is not Vegetarianism, it has no connection either with Free Love or the New Republic-in a word, it is Applied Socialism, and that is all there is to it."[195] For Reed, the difference between a socialist and Bolshevik was if they put their ideas into practice or not. Thus, the word served a dual meaning of both acknowledging those radicals who took part in practical political activity and highlighting their support for the Russian government and international socialism more broadly.

Part of this self-designation was a strategic attempt to reclaim the phrase from Red Scare propagandists who spread fear concerning a grand Bolshevik plot. Like during the War, the government and press dismissed workers who went on strike as foreign agents, this time serving the Russians. In response, the *Liberator* felt workers and socialists should proudly adopt the name and define it themselves before the media or police inevitably accused leftists of being part of the Bolshevik conspiracy anyway. Long time cartoonist Boardman Robinson stressed the

[195] John Reed, "Great Bolshevik Conspiracy!" *Liberator*, February 1919, 32.

absurdity of the American mania over Bolshevism in the April 1919 issue of the *Liberator*. In a cartoon, various senile politicians surround a female garment worker berating her with questions about the Bolshevik government.[196] Contrasting the absurdity of the state's idea of Bolshevism, was Clive Weeds cartoon in the July issue from that year. The cartoon featured two common factory workers sitting under a tree. As one eats his lunch the other points to a newspaper that featured the word Bolshevism in bold print. The worker remarked to his friend while holding up the page that "I know what Bolshevism means Bill- it means us!"[197] The point of the cartoon was to show that Bolshevism, as applied socialism, had existed in the U.S. before the Russian Revolution, in the form of collective action by workers against their employers. Even if the *Liberator* itself devoted ample space to covering the Russian government and the international socialist movement at large, average American workers' commitment to Bolshevism did not come from reading Lenin but from taking part in the fight against capitalism.

The *Liberator* treated Bolshevism as an existing impulse, given a new name in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution. When Crystal Eastman criticized the lack of representation in the American Federation of Labor's convention, she compared it to the problems with the original American constitution. She explained how "the wise fathers in 1796, who feared the Bolshevik tendencies of a lower house elected directly by the people, this popular body was to be checked by an upper house."[198] As often as the *Liberator* praised the Bolsheviks for their practicality, they also praised Lenin's government as the true representatives of the Russian masses. Thus, bolshevism was both scientific in its actions but also representative of the collective will.

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[196] Boardman Robinson, "Our Elder Statesmen Investigate the Bolsheviki," *Liberator,* April 1919, 26-27.
[197] Clive Weed, "I know what Bolshevism means…" *Liberator,* July 1919, 26-27.
[198] Crystal Eastman, "The Mooney Congress," *Liberator,* March 1919, 20.

Despite looking for inspiration from Lenin and the Russian government, the *Liberator* remained committed to distinctly American sources of radicalism, even if it did take the ahistorical form above. Eugene V. Debs especially symbolized the marriage of the American tradition and socialism. In an early issue of the *Liberator*, while Debs was on trial, Reed described him as "American, Middle Western, shrewd, tender-hearted, eloquent and indomitable. When I was a small boy my conception of Uncle Sam was just what I found Gene Debs to be- and I'm not at all sure my instinct was wrong."[199] The equally American and equally persecuted IWW had the same symbolic quality. Eastman argued that the IWW "was the only real contribution America has made to political history since 1789." [200] Dramatic statements of support like these were meant to celebrate the achievements of the American radical tradition as a counter to Red Scare propaganda while also suggesting what actors and organizations within the United States would play an important role in the coming revolution.

The *Liberator* embraced a new model of living the revolution that defined socialism as a practical science for human emancipation. While this new scientific attitude disrupted the harmony of art and politics seen in *The Masses*, the *Liberator* still published poetry and cartoons. Free artistic creativity played a role in the character of what the magazine published, as seen by Cornelia Barns work that depicted scenes from childhood or city life, but these products no longer carried the political weight they had during *The Masses* era [201] (Fig. 6). Instead, artists politicized their contributions by romanticizing the prisoners and martyrs in the struggle against

[199] John Reed, "With Gene Debs on the Fourth," *Liberator,* September 1918, 8.
[200] Max Eastman, "Bill Haywood, Communist," *Liberator,* April 1921, 13.
[201] Cornelia Barns, "Cover," *Liberator,* January 1921, 1.

capitalism.[202] Victims themselves of the government repression started by the World War, the *Liberator* recorded the persistent abuses of state power against individual socialists, anarchists, and members of the IWW.

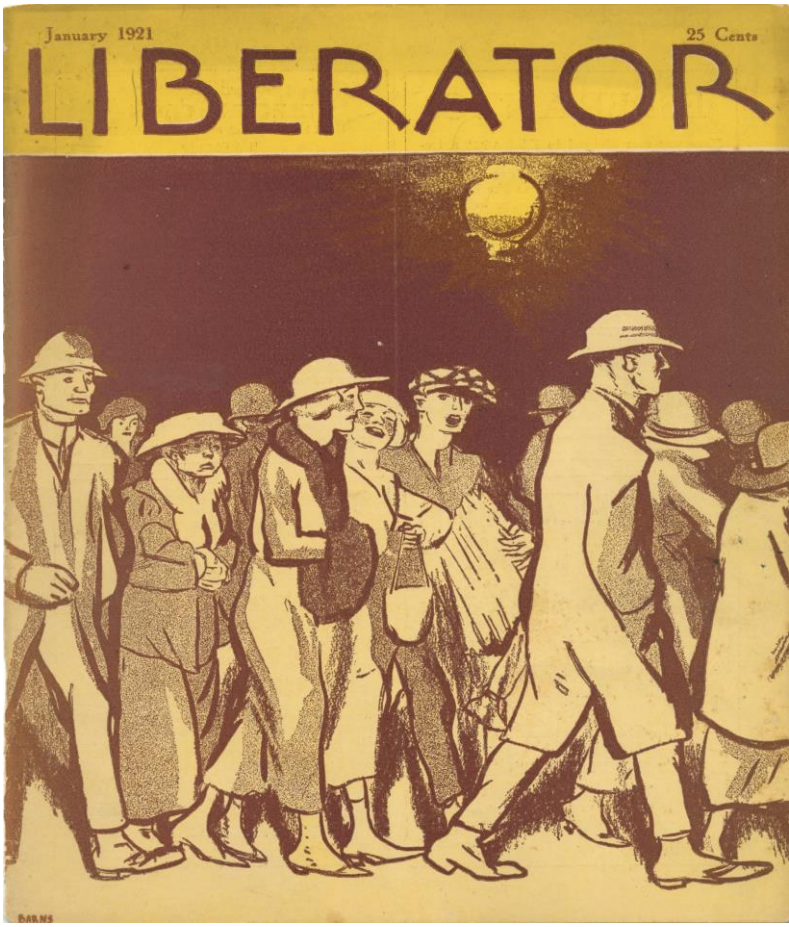

Fig. 6

While prison was a regular feature of life for striking workers and labor leaders throughout the run of *The Masses*, the wave of arrests, raids, and deportations orchestrated by U.S. attorney general Mitchell Palmer was unprecedented.[203] The *Liberator* viewed this as a wholesale assault on the left and democracy at large. These experiences convinced them that Bolshevik's skepticism of bourgeois democracy was valid, given the way the U.S. violated individuals' freedoms in the service of capitalism. At the same time, these abuses reinforced their belief in their righteousness. In one issue, Dell "observed that the more irrefutably democratic a cause, the more are lovers of democracy to be found in jail…"[204] The threat of government repression, ever-present because of their political beliefs, offered a similar kind of authenticity to bohemian free expression. In a world obstructed by Victorian morals, bohemians uniquely had access to

[202] Alan Wald described the way communist writers are often associated with realism "in regard to the race and class inequalities of capitalism…" but continued to explain how the vision of "the future of the American working class…might be most generously designated as romantic idealism." Similarly, the *Liberator* had a romantic sense that radicals' persecution and suffering in the present would be vindicated by the triumph of socialism in the future. For more see Alan M. Wald, *Exiles from a Future Time,* 11-13.
[203] Max Eastman, "Examples of Americanism," Liberator, February 1920, 13-16. Features a list of the individual locations raided under Palmer's orders.
[204] Floyd Dell, "New from the front," *Liberator*, May 1919, 46.

reality, then for the *Liberator,* in an unjust capitalist system the just endured punishment. In practical terms, the state targeted radicals like Eugene Debs, Bill Haywood, and Emma Goldman because of their effectiveness. Naturally, the greatest threats to the capitalist world would be the guiding spirits toward the next one. In short, the *Liberator* found in the victims of government repression the heroic leaders of the revolution.

Their faith in the relationship between repression and revolution drew on the experiences of the Bolsheviks. Both Trotsky and Lenin were involved with a failed uprising in 1905 and had spent the years before the October Revolution in exile and threatened with arrest. Trotsky had been living in the Bronx when the February Revolution against the Czar occurred. Dell, in a review of one of Trotsky's books, jokingly remarked how "To have risen from the obscure position of a Bronxite to the dizzy height of being some sort of Anarchist Despot gives Trotzky a place in the American heart."[205] He continued explaining the series of relocations and arrests that preceded Trotsky's victorious return to Russia. This depiction was consistent with an idea that prominent radicals would endure both repression and failure on the eventual path to success. On the one hand, this theme was reflective of the scientific attitude and the focus on trial and error. Yet, on the other hand, it endowed these individuals with a tragic destiny that artists and poets in the *Liberator* seized on.

During the Red Scare, the *Liberator* did not need to look abroad to find tragic revolutionary heroes. Eugene Debs, because of his higher profile and undeniable Americanness, was a regular source of inspiration. Boardman Robinson's cartoon of a solemn Debs confined to a jail cell, captioned "Our Candidate," was one of many examples of the *Liberator's* support for

[205] Floyd Dell, "Trotzky," *Liberator,* March 1918, 33.

Debs and their respect for his heroic endurance in the face of injustice.[206] After the magazine was printed the Socialist Party picked Debs to run in the upcoming election. Distancing himself a month later from mere electorialism, Eastman explained that “Eugene Debs is a great deal more to us than our candidate for President.”[207] Years earlier, Eastman described Debs as "the sweetest strong man in the world. He is a poet, and even more gifted of poetry in private speech than in public oratory. Every instant and incident of life is keen and sacred to him."[208] The warm, almost religious respect for Debs revealed how despite the *Liberator's* cold scientific fascination with Lenin and his tactics, the romanticism of *The Masses* persisted in the *Liberator* but in a different way. No longer did artists make reality intelligible through their work. Instead, the *Liberator* endowed the revolutionary's ability to endure punishment and repression with dignity as like the transcendent properties of great art.

The *Liberator's* romantic portrayal of prisoners extended to lower profile victims of state repression as well. The experience of imprisonment endowed radicals universally with spiritual strength. H. Austin Simons poem "Romance" describes the quiet reflections of an unnamed inmate, who at the end of his workday records "the romance of prison life."[209] The inmate considers how his adventurous life rivaled the likes of Robin Hood or the Three Musketeers. He then joyfully describes his bonds to others both in and out of prison. In the end, he described the experience as an "Adventure to challenge the free virile soul, Experienced to banish the stupendous pettiness of little living, The romance of imprisonment for a cause."[210] If the goal of imprisonment was to deter radicals, poems like Simons argued that the opposite occurred. The

[206] Boardman Robinson, “Our Candidate,” *Liberator,* April 1920, 4.
[207] Max Eastman, “Editorials,” *Liberator,* May 1920, 5.
[208] Max Eastman, “The Trial of Eugene Debs,” *Liberator,* November 1918, 9.
[209] H. Austin Simons, “Romance,” *Liberator,* April 1919, 39.
[210] Ibid.

experience of imprisonment reinforced the radical's love of others and commitment to freedom. Far from a defeat, the romantic prisoner replenished their spirit while in jail and came out of the experience a more effective radical than before.

Given that the depiction of imprisonment depended on living beyond the punishment, radical martyrs reflected a different kind of romanticism. Those who died for the cause of human emancipation entered a pantheon of heroes who would live on eternally in the memories of others. Karl Liebknecht's sudden death during the German Revolution propelled him into this exact position. Arturo Giovannitti's poem "The Senate of the Dead" imagined Liebknecht's interactions with other historical liberators like Spartacus, Lincoln, and his father Wilhelm Liebknecht, one of the founders of the German Social Democratic Party. At the end of his introductions to the others, a God-like figure spoke, explaining how when the eventual day of victory arrived Liebknecht "shall be rather among the heroes and the doers who are simply called out by the living...and hear and answer with a shout from the heart of the storm: Here I am, My Comrades. I am not dead. I have been marching right along with you, by your side, towards the great source and the great estuary, and lo! ye saw me not!"[211] For the living, the experience of imprisonment would be spiritually fulfilling but for the dead, they would become an eternal source of spiritual inspiration.

The *Liberator's* interest in martyrdom was especially strong considering the dramatic end of one of their own, John Reed. Not murdered like Liebknecht, Reed died during his restless mission to record the Russian Revolution and influence a similar event in the US. For months after Reed's death, the *Liberator* published tributes to him. One of these tributes, from Eastman,

[211] Arturo Giovannitti, "The Senate of the Dead," *Liberator,* March 1919, 14.

illustrated the romantic ideal of martyrdom. Eastman proclaimed that others admired Reed because "he is dead. But we speak to a different purpose. We pay our tribute to John Reed because he was an outlaw."[212] Eastman continued explaining that Reed's crime was his unyielding sympathy with the oppressed. With the cause that defined his life in mind, Eastman felt that "Our tribute to John Reed is a pledge that the cause he died for shall live."[213] This romantic sense of living on, present in the *Liberator's* treatment of both prisoners and the dead, was tied even into the name of the magazine. Named after William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist newspaper and intended as a reference to Lincoln, the *Liberator* impressed upon itself and the socialist movement at large the weight of a grand radical tradition. Every martyr, from John Reed to Karl Liebknecht, added their weight to that tradition, powering on instead of weighing down those who remained. Contrasted by their political focus on practicality, the romantic response of the *Liberator* to the costs of radical activity continued to offer a creative outlet for the artistic spirit so often praised in *The Masses.*

The *Liberator* artistically reinterpreted the actual challenges and threats facing radicals as both spiritually fulfilling and in the case of death as a tragic end that eternally endowed one's life with transcendent meaning. Even in death and defeat, radicals continued to contribute to their cause. More than just a source of inspiration, these ideas combined with the scientific attitude resulting in the collective assurance that the victory of international socialism was both inevitable and imminent. In the realm of political action, the radical was a professional revolutionary, who used a scientific pursuit of facts and engaged with material reality in an experimental fashion that produced generally applicable theories. At every step, the *Liberator*

[212] Max Eastman, "John Reed," *Liberator,* December 1920, 5.
[213] Ibid.

saw in the Bolshevik's novel and experimental progress the conformation of Marxist science. Eastman explained that "Seventy-two years ago Marx and Engels published their theory of the evolution of capitalism and the proletarian revolution, and it has survived every test and observation, and has held true in every minute detail even throughout this great bewildering spasm of history-the only thread and the only explanation upon which any serious mind can rest."[214] The *Liberator's* artistic spirit romanticized and justified revolutionary defeats while Eastman's faith in science made radical victories universal fulfillment of natural laws. From the joint experience of American repression and Russian success, the *Liberator* assured itself of Marx's and by proxy's Lenin's infallible logic but struggled to live the revolution as a science of inevitable human advancement while still adhering to their non-dogmatic principles.

The *Liberator* tried to make sense of their faith in the objective truth of Marxism, proven by the Bolshevik experiment, and their resistance to dogmatism, by arguing that freedom existed at the point of action. In one of the first issues of the *Liberator*, Floyd Dell reviewed a book by theologian and philosopher G.K. Chesterton. As he often did, Dell used the source material as a jumping-off point to consider wider theoretical issues. From Chesterton's work, Dell considered other revolutionary tendencies apart from Marxism. He explained that Chesterton's mixture of anti-capitalism and Catholicism rested on a principled belief in free-will. For Dell, this made Chesterton like anarchists, great artists, and other individualists. These radicals focus on free will made them more committed to revolution than Marxists, because, in theory, Marxism was a study of a series of evolutions driven by economically determinant forces of history. Dell summarized the problem by acknowledging that "The discovery of Marx, which gave the revolutionary movement knowledge, at the same time inhibited its will, by taking away its

[214] Max Eastman, "The New International," *Liberator*, July 1919, 28.

freedom."[215] For an action to have any meaning, the outcome of that action could not be predetermined.

Dell continued, explaining that certainty could only come from reflection later. Using the example of the Bolsheviks during the Revolution, Dell explained that at the point of action Lenin could not be certain about his action's success. For Dell only later would they learn "that the success of the Russian revolution was, for a lot of reasons, inevitable, predestined, economically determined."[216] Thus like Eastman argued in *The Masses,* radicals would never have access to predictive models of behavior at the point of action. Even if theory later confirmed that Marx's evolutionary scheme was objectively true, it could not figure out what radicals must do in the present. Dell concluded that "If a revolutionary movement is to act successfully, it must undoubtedly act along the lines of economic predestination; but if it is to act at all, it must exist in a world in which there is such a thing as free-will."[217] The scientific attitude then did not merely command radicals to emulate Lenin or the Bolsheviks, even if their actions would later be vindicated by Marxist theory. Instead, the science of revolution needed radicals to align themselves with what Marxism had proven as true but to also recognize that their actions may be incorrect, and that failure was the risk that made action possible.

The growing orthodoxy of the international communist movement strained the *Liberator's* attempt to hold onto the pragmatic necessity of free will while also praising the objective truth of Marxism. Eastman, undoubtedly a true believer at the time, still fought with other communists over their dogmatism and never personally joined a political party. He criticized members of the Communist Party as "pure and perfect theologians of Bolshevism,

[215] Floyd Dell, "Chesterton," *Liberator,* April 1918, 36.
[216] Ibid.
[217] Ibid.

whose only purpose is to establish in this country a secret brotherhood of revolutionary saints…"[218] Believing himself to still be an opponent of dogmatism, Eastman's uncritical support for Lenin and hostility toward those "sentimental socialists" that objected to the Russian government eroded his pragmatic credibility.[219] If *The Masses* featured a persistent tension between the necessity of individual freedom against the existence of a determined social reality, the *Liberator* years saw those tensions intensify. The *Liberator's* willingness to defend the Russian Revolution and the Bolshevik leadership shook this delicate balance. Regardless of whether Eastman joined the communist party officially or not, the defense of Soviet political violence, centralization, and their attacks on other leftists, eroded any meaningful difference between their position as independent political propaganda and a party affiliated magazine.

The overzealous defense of the Bolsheviks overshadowed the *Liberator's* new means of living the revolution as a practically minded actor supported by objective Marxist science and a romantic sense of spiritual fulfillment. Attacks on former friends and collaborators, critical of the Bolsheviks, like Morris Hillquit and Bertrand Russell were particularly egregious examples.[220] Overall these attacks disrupted The *Liberator's* careful balance between freedom and predestined knowledge. Assured of the victory of international socialism and that the Bolsheviks had begun this inevitable wave of change, the *Liberator* lashed out at any opposing voice. Hidden just beneath the surface of these acts was not a principled recognition of the necessity of freedom and different solutions but faith that the outcomes would vindicate them.

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[218] Max Eastman, "An opinion on tactics," *Liberator,* Oct 1921, 6.
[219] Ibid.
[220] Max Eastman, "Nietzsche, Plato, and Bertrand Russell," *Liberator,* September 1920, 5. and Max Eastman, "Hillquit Repeats His Error," *Liberator,* January 1921, 20.

Liberator (1922-1924)

The post-Eastman era of the *Liberator* began in January of 1922. Still listed as an editor, Eastman responded to the dissatisfaction with his leadership by turning over the executive position. No longer bound to the monthly publishing schedule, he left the U.S. for Russia in 1922. Intended as an opportunity to see Lenin and his government firsthand, Eastman dallied around Paris arriving in Moscow shortly before Lenin passed away. Having missed the man but still devoted to his legacy, Eastman stayed in Russia for over a year, forging a friendship with another famous Lenin disciple Leon Trotsky. He stayed abroad until 1927, well after the demise of the *Liberator,* but still published, albeit, infrequently in the magazine about his experiences in Russia and Lenin's legacy. Away from the magazine Eastman was productive translating several of Trotsky's books into English and writing a handful of his own on Lenin and Marx.[221]

His sister and *Liberator* co-founder Crystal Eastman had already reduced her role in the magazine before Max left for Europe. After having spent time in the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic, filling John Reed's role in the *Liberator* as a popular journalist of revolution, Crystal returned to the U.S. and refocused herself on the feminist movement.[222] She became frustrated with her perceived complacency of the feminist movement after the passing of the 19th Amendment and their unwillingness to address other issues like the legality of birth control and the equality of African American women. Hoping to influence the movement towards a more radical position Crystal supported Alice Paul's leadership of the National Woman's Party.[223] They met and worked together to create the Equal Rights Amendment, then spent the following years

[221] Max Eastman, *Love and Revolution,* 328-335.
[222] Crystal Eastman, "In Communist Hungary," *Liberator,* August 1919, 37.
[223] Crystal Eastman, "Alice Paul's Convention," *Liberator,* April 1921, 9-10.

advocating for its ratification. Split between her activism and personal life, Crystal stepped away from the *Liberator,* resigning from her editorship in March 1921.[224]

Without the Eastmans, the *Liberator* struggled. In their place, Michael Gold and Claude McKay worked as joint executive editors. The two clashed constantly. Gold was a firm believer that art about the working class should come from the workers themselves. Eastman recalled how Gold wanted the *Liberator* to "go out into the farms and factories, not omitting also the slums and gutters, and find talented working men and women who would produce a really proletarian art and literature."[225] McKay disagreed, holding to the older *Masses* idea that the magazine should be a platform for free expression. His belief in art's intrinsic value was the sole reason E.E. Cumming had two poems published in the *Liberator* after McKay defended their worth to Eastman who felt they had no social or political message.[226] Along with Dell, McKay tried to restore the balance between art, literature, and politics in the *Liberator.* These competing ideas, between what Eastman described as the zealots and the free thinkers, were more than just an intellectual disagreement. Both McKay and Eastman remembered Gold as unpleasant at best and often cruel. After a near fistfight between the two head editors, McKay resigned and joined Eastman in Russia before setting off on to travel through Europe and North Africa.[227] The short-lived and tumultuous duel executive period worsened the already difficult task of publishing given the magazine's growing financial problems.[228]

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[224] Max Eastman, "Editorials," *Liberator,* March 1921, 5.
[225] Eastman, *Love and Revolution,* 267.
[226] Claude McKay, *A Long Way From Home* (New York: l. Furman, Inc., 1937), 84-85.
[227] Claude McKay, *A Long Way From Home,* 111-112.
[228] The Editors, "Announcement," *Liberator,* January 1922, 9. The first issue of the new year called for readership support to overcome a $6,000 yearly deficit.

By July McKay's resignation made Gold the sole executive editor. Despite his accused zealotry and the conflicts behind the scenes at the publishing office, the *Liberator* remained remarkably consistent in its quality and drifted more towards literature than it had in the past few years. Personal issues aside, Gold's *Liberator* featured work from both Eastman and McKay. The most glaring absence was Floyd Dell. The success of his first novel *Moon-Calf* published in 1921 made Dell a rising star in the literary world. While working on his next novel, a sequel to *Moon-Calf* about marriage, unsurprisingly Dell contributed a multi-part essay series titled "The Outline of Marriage," to the *Liberator.* Even *Moon-Calf* reflected Dell's prolonged interest in childhood and adolescence, ideas he often reflected on in his reviews and essays. In the grip of inspiration Dell took only a brief break before diving back into his work releasing a third book *Janet March* in 1923.

Possessing an endless well of ideas and a startling intellectual range, Dell was the single greatest inheritor of the wild and free expression championed by *The Masses,* and the most crushed by Greenwich Village's descent into commercial mediocrity. As such he never quite fit into Eastman's Lenin worshiping *Liberator* with its valorization of science and fact.[229] At odds also with Gold's idea of proletarian literature, one of Dell's rare appearances in the *Liberator* during this period was to defend his remarks about the middle-class nature of the literary profession. Bluntly Dell explained how "Comrade Mike, I think, really cherishes the romantic delusion that he belongs to the working class. But the fact is that Comrade Mike is a literary man, an intellectual, and a member of the salaried middle class."[230] More openly at odds with some of the magazine's ideas than Eastman or McKay, Dell never separated himself as

[229] While critical, Dell often expressed a certain sympathy with the artist's attitude the *Liberator* argued against in favor of Lenin's scientific example.
[230] Floyd Dell, "Explanations and Apologies," *Liberator,* June 1922, 25.

completely as they did and with the *Liberator* in a state of financial crisis at the end of 1922, he returned to try to salvage the situation.

Despite the increased frequency of fundraising events, Gold struggled to raise enough money for the October issue. Published late and with a lower paper quality than usual, Dell had to take the executive position for there to be an issue at all.[231] Gold had unexpectedly resigned heading to California to, as Art Young remembered, "rest his torn nerves and write a novel."[232] Having only just scraped together the last issue, the looming challenge of turning out another one in November proved too great. In his memoir, Young reflected on the poor performance of the *Liberator* in its final years, explaining how "Circulation had fallen off, and the going was hard, what with the steadily widening cleavage in the radical movement in the United States."[233] When Eastman and others created the *Liberator* they thought that the stories of the Russian Revolution would galvanize and inspire the left. And they did for a time. But years of leftist infighting between those that supported Lenin's Revolution and its critics divided the movement.

The *Liberator* itself played a role in this division. Political coverage reframed the debates between the right-wing and left-wing of the American Socialist Party in terms of the life or death struggle between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in Russia, or the German Social Democrats role in the deaths of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. The *Liberator* treated those radicals uncomfortable with the new Bolshevik direction not as political allies but as traitors whose weakness or corruption would betray the workers when the decisive moment of the revolution came.[234] The accuracy of these connections aside, the result made a political debate over tactics

[231] "Apologies," *Liberator,* October 1922, 13.
[232] Art Young, *Art Young: His Life and Times,* 391.
[233] Ibid.
[234] Crystal Eastman, "The Socialist Party Convention," *Liberator,* July 1920, 24-25.

and goals into a perceived fight over the very soul of the socialist movement. Tensions raised and with each side refusing to give in the already niche radical community divided into smaller and more insular groups. *The Masses* anti-dogmatism made it appealing to a wider audience of bohemians, socialists, anarchists, and left-wing progressives. The *Liberator* in its uncritical support for the Bolsheviks backed itself into a smaller subset of support restricted to the communist camp. With few options left and the looming death sentence that would come from selling the magazine to a commercial publisher, Dell called for a vote on the *Liberator's* future. The contributing editors gathered and voted to give financial control over to the recently organized Workers Party.[235]

Formerly the Communist Labor Party of America, the Workers Party began as John Reed's offshoot from the larger American Socialist Party. In its first years, government repression forced the Party to work in secret. Weakened by frequent raids, arrests, and Reed's death, the Party nevertheless persisted because of support among influential voices like the *Liberator.* The Party's connection to John Reed, whose legend grew in the years following his death, contributed to a truce and then the merger with the other communist offshoot from the Socialist Party. A united Communist Party formed in 1920 and quickly rebranded as the Workers Party in 1921 to sound more appealing to the labor movement at large.[236] Hoping to expand its base of support, the Workers Party recognized the propaganda opportunity owning the *Liberator* presented. The mutually beneficial relationship between the *Liberator* and the Workers Party gave the magazine needed financial support from a politically agreeable organization. At the

[235] Art Young, *Art Young: His Life and Times,* 391-392.
[236] Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States: A History of the American Left* (New York, Verso Books, 2013) 121-155.

same time, the Party could use the well-respected publication to boost the profiles and ideas of its leaders.[237]

The Workers Party reorganized the *Liberator's* staff and helped fund a joint November-December issue which quietly announced the magazine's final phase. Old mainstay and Workers Party loyalist Robert Minor became the new executive editor. A skilled journalist and even better cartoonist, Minor stayed with the *Liberator* even after Eastman attacked him for his criticism of Lenin in 1919.[238] By 1922, Minor had seen the light and was now a devoted communist. While he had traveled extensively through Europe as a foreign correspondent earlier, Minor dedicated himself to the Party and national politics after his return to the U.S.[239] Under Minor, Joseph Freeman continued to serve in Dell's old position as associate editor. Along with Gold and McKay, Freeman joined the *Liberator's* staff in the 1920s. A Ukrainian Jewish immigrant, Freeman's family fled anti-Jewish pogroms in the Russian Empire in 1904. His family did well, carving out a middle-class life in New York. Freeman, both intellectually gifted and politically curious joined the Socialist Party at 17 and then attended Columbia University. Like Minor, he was a member of the Workers Party by 1923 and bridged the gap between some of the older bohemian holdouts like Dell and younger proletarian writers.[240]

[237] Robert Minor, "Editorial," *Liberator*, November-December 1922, 5.
[238] Max Eastman, "Bob Minor and the Bolsheviki," *Liberator,* March 1919, 5.
[239] Richard Fitzgerald, *Art and Politics,* 79-121.
[240] Alan M. Wald, *Exiles from a Future Time* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002) 9-12

The fact that many of the *Liberator's* editors were already supporters of the Workers Party gave the magazine a degree of independence. Neither the Party nor the *Liberator*'s staff planned on reducing the magazine into a political newspaper that merely echoed Party positions and priorities. Art and poetry with no intrinsic political message, let alone a message authored by the Party, still added to the overall character of the publication. Frank Walts series of covers between April and September 1923 signaled to both contributors and readers that the *Liberator* still existed as an outlet for creative work [241] (Fig. 7). At the same time, this degree of creative freedom did not extend into politics. The Workers Party directed the magazine's political messaging and coverage. Overnight the editorial board gained several new members, all coming from the Party's central committee. Other than Eastman as the sole exception, none of the new political editors had any prior relationship to the *Liberator*. Instead, the editorial page listed familiar names like Floyd Dell, Boardman Robinson, and Arturo Giovannitti separately as art editors. This explicit divide between the artistic and political content was the cost of the *Liberator* losing its independence. The introduction of a party-line gave the

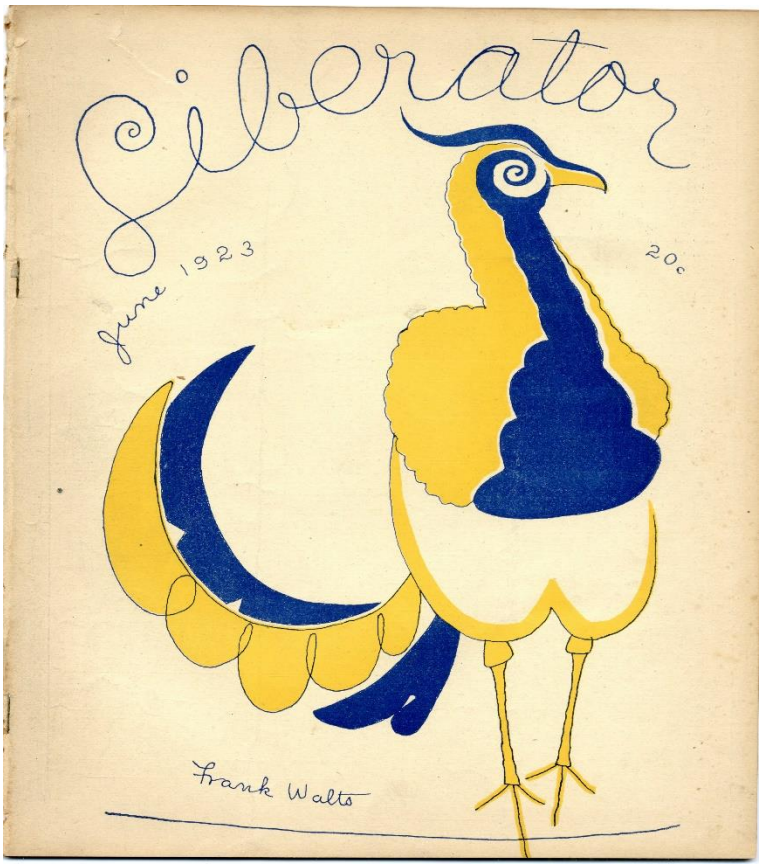

Fig. 7.

[241] Frank Walts, "Cover," *Liberator*, June 1923, 1.

magazine an overall coherence it lacked in the past but at the expense of the intellectual curiosity that had melded politics, philosophy, and art before.[242]

While not without a cost, the introduction of new political editors aligned the *Liberator* with national politics in a way that Eastman's Bolshevik obsessed earlier period did not. Eastman created the *Liberator* to spread John Reed's reports of the Russian Revolution. From there a major part of the magazine's political mission was covering, defining, and aligning itself with international socialism in its Bolshevik form. While still embedded in an American political context, the Eastman *Liberator* cast its gaze abroad, assured that a wave of revolutions would sweep through Europe from the east. Eastman's sojourn in Europe following the end of his editorship was further evidence that his attention was on international events. Now the Workers Party pulled the *Liberator's* attention back to the home front. While the Party-affiliated itself with the Communist International, even going so far as putting Hungarian communist John Pepper in a leadership position, their main goal was to organize support among the American working class.[243] Debates concerning Soviet policies and the likelihood of a Revolution in German were of less importance than communists playing important roles in the concrete struggles of American workers.

The Workers Party viewed the political contest for influence over the American labor movement as a zero-sum game. National labor leaders like Samuel Gompers and John L. Lewis despotically controlled major labor organizations like the American Federation of Labor or the United Mine Workers of America. The struggle over the leadership of the working class would only come from confronting these tyrants head-on. Achieving victory meant infiltration into

[242] Art Young, *Art Young His Life and Times*, 392.
[243] Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism* (New York, The Viking Press, 1957) 381.

mainstream labor organizations, not the creation of separate and competing radical unions.[244] Political columns in the *Liberator* educated their readers about those militant activists who rebelled against corrupt union officials. Figures like Alexander Howat, who challenged Lewis' leadership of the United Mine Workers, were the potential allies the Workers Party needed to both dethrone conservative opponents and increase their influence over the rank and file.[245]

To support militant workers more broadly the Party created the Trade Union Educational League. In the *Liberator* Earl Browder described the League as a "training school, and a machine shop; it takes these raw militants and turns them into engineers of the revolution with a shop to work in."[246] To consistently advocate for a set of tactics from the mouths of the organizers themselves was a new feature of the *Liberator's* political coverage. Supportive of unions like the IWW or individual leaders like Eugene Debs, neither the *Masses* nor the earlier *Liberator* ever became the official voice of a political faction. Reed and Eastman founded *The Masses* on anti-dogmatic principles. That the magazine was independent from outside control or influence made this stance possible. Independently ran *The Masses* had the freedom to critique even those organizations like the IWW that it agreed with. Now under the Workers Party and with columns written by Party organizers themselves, the *Liberator* was married to a set rigid tactics that changed its political identity.

The Party's plan extended beyond the internal political dynamics of the labor movement. Electorally they planned to develop a competitive labor party built from a coalition of different unions, interest groups, and smaller more specialized political organizations. Recognizing the Party's inability to organize mass movements on its own, working as a part of larger coalitions,

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[244] Editors, "Stool Pigeon Capitalism: Gompers and John L. Lewis," *Liberator,* October 1923, 5.
[245] J. Louis Engdahl, "Howat the Coaldigger," *Liberator,* June 1923, 22.
[246] Earl R. Browder, "The Machine Shop of the Revolution," *Liberator,* October 1923, 27.

like infiltrating national labor unions, played to its strength. Instead of needing to overcome years of anti-communist propaganda and active political repression, the small but disciplined group could take key leadership positions. Avoiding the hurdle of having to win the masses over to communism from the outset, by working from within big tent organizations, the Party's base of militant activists could wield power and influence in the present. This honest appraisal of communists' current abilities made the establishment of a labor party, headed by communists, more important than an independent communist party that took part in elections.[247]

By August 1923 the *Liberator* declared "The long looked for labor party was founded in Chicago on July third, fourth, and fifth."[248] The Farm-Labor Party, in existence since 1919, sent invitations to a wide range of trade unions and leftist groups for its national convention in July of 1923. Originally called the Labor Party, the organization expanded out to also represent struggling farmers bankrupted by the agricultural recession that followed the World War. Recalling a long history of populist politics, the Farm-Labor Party had the most support in the mid-West and was especially strong in Minnesota. Increasingly dissatisfied with only competing in state elections, the Party had national ambitions that clashed with the vision of the larger Conference for Progressive Political Action. The 1923 convention was the result of the Farm-Labor Party's break with the Conference in favor of pursuing national electoral competitiveness. For the Workers Party, this break amounted to a potential turning point in American politics. Workers gave up on an alliance with progressives and liberals, instead tried to use their political power toward their interests as a class. To further develop workers' class consciousness, the communists needed to set themselves as a guiding vanguard within the organization.[249] Like the

[247] John Pepper, "The Worker Party and the Federated Farm Labor Party," *Liberator,* August 1923, 10.
[248] Editors, "The Federated Farm-Labor Party," *Liberator,* August 1923, 5.
[249] C.E. Rutenberg, *The Farm-Labor United Front* (Chicago: Workers Party of America, 1924).

Party's relationship with the *Liberator*, its success rested on taking control of already established institutions, which in turn would position them to take control of larger targets.

Only one of many different invited groups, the Workers Party's internal discipline propelled it into a leading position within the organization. John Pepper explained a month later, in the August 1923 issue of the *Liberator* how "The Workers Party was the driving and unifying force in the July 3rd Convention for forming a Federated Farmer-Labor Party."[250] By capturing influential positions within the federation, the communists believed they had positioned themselves as the leaders of a mass political movement. The Workers Party itself only had "20,000 members, and the Socialist Party in its best times did not have much more than 100,000 members."[251] Now at the head of a political party with a membership of 616,000 industrial and agricultural workers, covering every major industry, the July convention was American communists' greatest political victory so far.

Subject to the Party's goals the *Liberator* was unable to think for itself. Party officials used the magazine as a platform for a set of political goals and tactics that obstructed the possibility for any independent political thought. Once an expression of urbanite artists and writer's infatuation with the possibility of a world-wide communist revolution, now the *Liberator* issued stories about the plight of small farmers to make the Workers Party more appealing to Farm-Labor members.[252] The concrete political needs of the Party dedicated what the *Liberator* covered out of tactical necessity, not genuine interest. Most dramatically Party direction resulted in the physical relocation of the *Liberator.* An established institution in New York and Greenwich Village particularly, the *Liberator* moved its publishing office to Chicago in October of 1923. The move

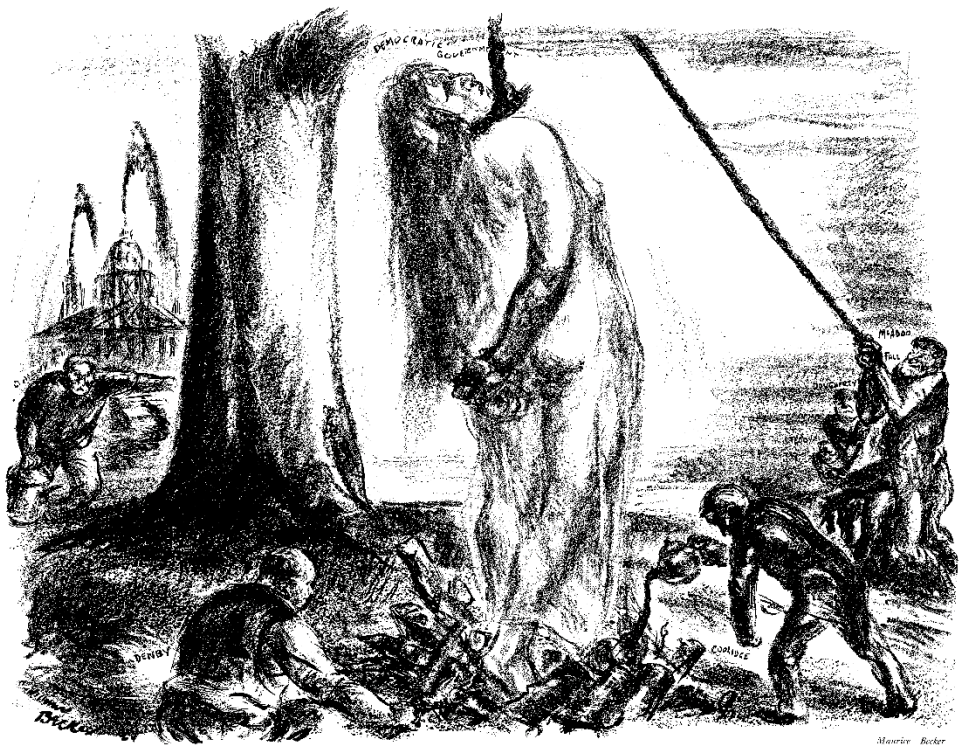
[250] John Pepper, "The Workers Party and the Federated Farm Labor Party," August 1923, 11.
[251] Pepper, *Liberator,* 10.
[252] C.E. Rutenberg, "Workers and Farmers on the Mark, *"Liberator,* July 1924, 16.

to Chicago uprooted the *Liberator* from the artistic environment that had contributed to its unique style. Bound to the Workers Party, the *Liberator's* political coverage became didactic and required approval from the Party's executive committee. In this environment the *Liberator's* residual creativity continued as a relic of the past.

Yet, the art's quality remained high and it was in the *Liberator's* political cartoons where both the magazine's creative spirit and its most interesting political opinions found refuge. Fred Ellis, Robert Minor, and Lydia Gibson contributed some of their best work during this final period. The two-page spread featured in each issue of the *Liberator,* more than the opening editorial page, was where Minor proved his valuable contribution to the magazine. Occasionally these cartoons echoed the Party line like Minor's "Labor Gets Up," where a giant worker breaks free of the ropes that held him lying face down on the ground. All around the giant, tiny capitalists run off in fright, with one pausing to tell the worker that he should not stand up for fear of being labeled a Bolshevik. The caption contextualized the cartoon as a representation of the founding of the Federated Farm-Labor Party.[253] Most often the cartoons portrayed apocalyptic scenes of capitalistic cruelty. Fred Ellis 'cartoon "Selective Immigration," which featured foreign workers attached to meat hooks and inspected for union or communist tendencies offered a bleak portrayal of the helplessness of immigrants in the face of industrial tyranny.[254]

[253] Robert Minor, Labor Gets Up," *Liberator,* August 1923, 18-19.
[254] Fred Ellis, "Selective Immigration," *Liberator,* February 1924, 18-19.

These cartoons point out how the exuberance of the post-Revolution left had not just cooled into a more realistic incremental communism centered on Party activity, but into a fatalistic view of the present. Maurice Becker's cartoon "Finale," featured the female embodiment of democratic government being lynched and burned by a group that included President Coolidge, standing near the flame adding fuel to the fire. One of many, cartoons like Beckers created a startlingly bleak depiction of the era [255] (Fig. 8). The likelihood of radical change in America seemed impossible given what the *Liberator* saw as a conservative political environment that tacitly approved of racial violence from the Klan. Beckers cartoon featuring national politicians using Klan tactics shows how the *Liberator* related conservative governments with reactionary terrorism as united in their goal of destroying freedom. One of the causes of this pessimism was the normalization of Red Scare tactics. No longer justified by the shock of Soviet victory or the World War, nevertheless the security state continued. Minor depicted the situation in his cartoon "The Man on Horseback." In it, a large knight draped in the American flag and named



Finale

Fig. 8.

[255] Maurice Becker, "Finale," *Liberator*, March 1924, 18-19.

Burns, after the head of the Bureau of Investigation, used his horse to trample both human bodies and the Constitution.[256]

Where before the *Liberator* treated progressive presidents like Roosevelt and Wilson as sophisticated frauds stealing radical talking points in the service of the status quo, the magazine now treated Harding and Coolidge as the blatant henchmen of capitalism. Discussing Coolidge's record as a strikebreaker, Minor claimed: "All capitalist presidential candidates from now on will be candidates for the office of National Strikebreaker for the great strikes that loom ahead."[257] With the executive's role defined, the *Liberator* also described the Supreme Court as Blackshirts and remarked that Harding's two recent appointments were both "Mussolinis..."[258] Mussolini's fascist movement in Italy served as a reference point for the extreme new forms that reactionary governments would take now that communism was a viable political alternative. The Klan above all else symbolized the American breed of fascism. The subject of cartoons and poems, the magazine treated the Klan as a truly evil antagonist carrying out a regime of terror on southern African Americans. Minor presented readers with a scene from the South, in the cartoon, "Exodus from Dixie," where a long precession of African Americans fled from a backdrop of lynched bodies hanging from trees and KKK graffiti. The seriousness of the Klan's portrayal contrasted sharply with the *Liberator's* treatment of one of its other major opponents, Samuel Gompers. Where the Klan were faceless terrorists, Gompers was a ridiculous fool, more worthy of laughter than fear.[259]

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[256] Robert Minor, "The Man on Horseback," *Liberator,* May 1923, 26-27.
[257] Robert Minor, "Coolidge," *Liberator,* September 1923, 5.
[258] Robert Minor, "Blackshirt Supreme Court," *Liberator,* May 1923.
[259] Don Brown, "Lese Majeste," *Liberator,* April 1923, 18-19.

If Eastman's *Liberator* gave itself the task of defending the initial arrival of socialism as a concrete force on the world stage, the Workers Party's period presented itself as the organized opposition to the "period of reaction," they found themselves in.[260] The struggle against reaction changed the treatment of the heroic Soviets, who for the *Liberator* were the sole champions of progress. Fred Ellis' cartoon "The Victor," featured a lone Soviet warrior cheerfully riding away from the discarded corpses of his enemies to an observing capitalist's horror.[261] While still triumphant, the cartoon, captioned as the Soviets defeat of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, had a much darker tone than the earlier treatments of the Russian government. For example, in the July 1920 issue of the *Liberator,* Art Young's cartoon "Too Much Light" featured a variety of figures shielding themselves from the sunlight of Bolshevik Europe.[262] Young's soft cartoonish style struggled to match the overall pessimism of the current moment. Instead Ellis' harsher sketches reflected how radicals reconsidered the challenges ahead of them. The assurance and optimism of the earlier *Liberator* meet disappointment and reaction at every turn. Even their heroes had hardened, from rays of progressive sunlight to efficient warriors, to persist in an age defined more by reaction than revolution.

The pessimistic tone of the *Liberator's* late period cartoons contrasted with the Workers Party's tactics. As convincing as the Party's arguments were concerning the importance of a persistent and concrete political effort, the fatalism embedded in the *Liberator's* depiction of American life, made it seem that only a miraculous revolution could bring change. In his cartoon "We all stand for American Institutions," Robert Minor illustrated those institutions as a platform carrying the 1924 presidential candidates only held up by wage slavery, caste terror, imperialism,

[260] John Pepper, "The New Wave of World Revolution," *Liberator,* November 1923, 10.
[261] Fred Ellis, "The Victor," *Liberator,* November 1923, 18-19
[262] Art Young, "Too Much Light," *Liberator,* July 1920, 26-27.

and farm exploitation.[263] In the face of these entrenched horrors, how could even a labor party make a difference if it had to stand on the same platform to attain any power or recognition? While the Party tried to funnel revolutionary excitement into manageable and incremental causes, the *Liberator's* apocalyptic view of the present predicted that the task ahead was even more difficult than the practically minded Party leadership understood.

In the end, the Workers Party's plan failed. They bet on the wrong horse. Left by the Farm-Labor Party, the Conference for Progressive Political Action regrouped around the Presidential run of former Republican but lifelong progressive Robert La Follette. To support the campaign and under La Follette's leadership, the C.P.P.A. reformed as a new Progressive Party.[264] The Farm-Labor conference in 1924 considered whether to support La Follette or run their candidates. Aware of La Follette's animosity toward the Workers Party and his endorsement from the rival Socialist Party, the communists backed United Mine Worker official Duncan McDonald as the labor candidate. Others disagreed and the organization broke down as some Party delegates rejoined the C.P.P.A. and backed La Follette. With the national party reduced to its separate state branches, the Workers Party quickly changed gears running William Z. Foster on their ticket.[265] Unsurprisingly Foster was unable to make a sizable electoral impact. The crusade to create a national labor party etched into the columns of the *Liberator* left the Party locked outside of mainstream political influence.

Their poor political performance during the election and the *Liberator's* economic instability pushed the Workers Party to reevaluate the usefulness of several of their publications.

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[263] Robert Minor, "We all stand for American Institutions," *Liberator,* August 1924, 18-19.
[264] William Z. Foster, "The Convention of the Conference for Progressive Political Action," *Liberator,* August 1924, 7.
[265] "Foster for President," *Liberator,* September 1924, 36.

Purchasing the *Liberator* to connect itself with a wider audience and the popular legacy of *Masses*, the Party had taken over a publication whose readership was already communists. The redundancy of having several different magazines all aimed at the same audience made the Workers Party consolidate its resources. The creation of the *Daily Worker* in January 1924 made those other publications even less important. Celebrated as the first of its kind, a daily newspaper aimed at informing and educating the working class, the *Daily Worker* had the kind of reactivity and didactic political value that the more abstract *Liberator* lacked.[266] Soon after its creation, the Workers Party announced that it was combining the *Labor Herald*, a magazine tied to the Trade Union Educational League, the *Soviet Russia Pictorial*, and the *Liberator* into a single publication. Announced in the October 1924 issue of the *Liberator*, the Party released the *Workers Monthly* in November. Besides the inclusion of cartoons from former *Liberator* contributors, the new magazine carried even less of the original spirit of the *Masses.* With no editorial input from anyone outside of the Party's central committee, the project which began as a combination of radical politics, art, poetry, and literature, lived for over a decade before being subsumed by the evolving nature and political needs of the movement it celebrated.[267]

Communism, the Party, and the Radicals Dilemma

If Eastman's *Liberator* remade *The Masses* as Bolsheviks, the final two years under the Workers Party remade the *Liberator* into party communists. The *Liberator* used the terms Bolshevik and communists interchangeably at times but normally contributors referred to themselves as Bolsheviks before 1922 and as communists after the Worker Party buyout. More than semantics, the importance was the emphasis away from the individual Bolshevik to the

[266] Editors, "The Bolshevik Daily" *Liberator*, February 1924, 5.
[267] Editors, "Announcing the *Workers Monthly,"* Liberator, October 1924, 5.

collective party member. In its final years, the *Liberator* described a model of living the revolution based on collective engagement over individual experiences and ways of thinking. This new model of living the revolution created a different sense of radical self-identity that shaped how the *Liberator* approached politics.

During the Eastman phase, the deliberate use of the word Bolshevik served a dual purpose. On the one hand, it signaled their support for Lenin, the Bolshevik Party, and the Russian Revolution. Immediately the word declared their solidarity with the Revolution and separated them from other parts of the socialist movement that was more skeptical or outright critical of Lenin's leadership. On the other hand, the foreignness of the world itself signaled their allegiance too and faith in a worldwide revolution that had simply started with Russia. For the *Liberator,* militant strikes and radical revolutions were just localized manifestations of the international class struggle. The same social forces that made the Russian Revolution existed everywhere; the goal was to capitalize on them in a way that was intelligible for the specific cultural climates. The *Liberator's* responsibility then was to "endorse the general program of soviet formation, when it is already so completely spread over the world in concrete reality, wherever a great strike occurs, from Vladivostok to Winnipeg, from Norway to Buenos Ares."[268] More than just their allegiance to Lenin, the use of Bolshevik signaled the *Liberator's* global outlook. Wherever class struggle occurred, the *Liberator* found Bolsheviks.

Politically the title also acknowledged that any socialists that did actively engage in a revolutionary struggle would require the aid and support of the Russian state. Because of this, the *Liberator* was convinced that the transformative wave of world revolutions would necessarily

[268] Max Eastman, "The New International," *Liberator,* July 1919, 32.

move from Russia in the East to the West. Hugo Gellert's cover for the May 1921 issue of the *Liberator* featuring a red Russian giant sweeping across the globe, condensed this idea to its simplest form.[269] The German Revolution, Spartacus Insurrection, and rise of Bela Kun's communist government in Hungary confirmed their hopes. Eastern and Central Europe, closer to Russia and weakened by the World War, seemed destined to fall. It was in the West that international socialism faced its greatest obstacle. Eastern Europe was an "empire of destruction," while the continued strength of liberal political life in the West made it so that "the masses are only beginning to be awakened to consciousness."[270] This sense of the greater challenge posed in the West but also the inevitable victory of international socialism was symbolized by Art Young's two-page political cartoon published in the February 1919 issue of the *Liberator.* The cartoon depicted the endless masses of the world's workers marching toward capitalism's final fort. On the ramparts, sandbags of gold reinforced the fort's wall, while the defenders of capitalism, including Hoover, Wilson, J.P Morgan, and the engorged personification of the press, desperately tried to placate the workers with empty slogans.[271]

Yet the victory of reaction on every front, aside from Russia, raised doubts about the likelihood of this global confrontation with capitalism. Earlier radicals "came to life on the wave of enthusiasm inspired by the Russian Revolution."[272] The resulting "spontaneous outburst" inspired the founding of the Communist Party.[273] Ignited by international events the movement's passion and excitement impeded its ability "to consider the necessity of planning the slow, difficult, painful process through which the American workers would be educated to the necessity

[269] Hugo Gellert, "Cover," *Liberator,* May 1921, 1.
[270] Max Eastman, "The New International," 32.
[271] Art Young, "Holding the Fort," *Liberator,* February 1919, 26-27.
[272] C.E. Ruthenberg, "Communism in the Open Again," *Liberator,* February 1923, 12.
[273] Ibid.

of acting upon Communist principles."[274] The key then was not the existence of pragmatic revolutionaries that could seize the historical moment, but a more slowly constructed movement that spoke the language of the average laborers.

The *Liberator* now criticized radicals who focused on international events. In his article describing the importance of a national labor party, John Pepper stated that the "so-called revolutionists in America… can record a political earthquake when it is far away from here, in Turkey, in India, or Bulgaria, but they are rendered useless when a political earthquake occurs right here in America…"[275] Unlike revolutionists, communists would focus on the class struggle and mold the working class into an "instrument to transform capitalism into communism."[276] Not merely a return to reformism but also not an all-out push for revolution, the Party explained the radical change as coming from a longstanding and deliberate effort to capture the state by using the power of an organized and disciplined working class. Thus, to build this relationship with the workers, the Party's base needed to be "among the working-class masses themselves, in the factory, at the place of work."[277] Echoing Gold's ideas about proletarian literature, which increased in popularity among the literary left in the 30s, the Party wanted to collapse any differences between radicals and workers.[278] The emphasis was on a Party that did not just speak for workers but was a manifestation of their interests.

Of course, socialists always believed that the working class was the chief instrument of radical politics. However, in both the *Masses* and the Eastman *Liberator* it was the identification

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[274] Ibid.
[275] John Pepper, "The Declaration of Independence of the American Working Class," *Liberator,* July 1923, 8.
[276] C.E. Ruthenberg, "The Revolutionary Party," *Liberator,* February 1924, 12.
[277] Ibid.
[278] Scholars credit Gold's semi-autobiographical novel *Jews Without Money* released in 1930 as the beginning of American proletarian literature. See Alan M. Wald, *Exiles from a future time,* 55-56.

with the workers more than the identification as a worker that was important. When Dell confronted Mike Gold about his claim to be a proletariat, he considered it absurd that someone would valorize the objectively miserable life of the industrial worker. As intellectuals and writers, they enjoyed the leisure and freedom that would belong to everyone after the revolution. They had a responsibility to not just selfishly enjoy themselves but to be the workers "spokesmen." Thus, their value to the revolutionary movement resulted "precisely because we are not workers ourselves. It is because we have had leisure to devote to the art of writing or the art of making pictures, so that we can do such things well."[279] At the core of Dell's argument was not just the importance of an honest appraisal of one's social position but the value of individualism. To Dell, artists, writers, and intellectuals, were more valuable to radical political causes in their complete individuality. To pretend to be something they were not, in the service of a set of political values, hindered both their self-fulfillment and the struggle they took part in.

Dell's defense of individuality was not only at odds with Gold's literary ideas but with the Workers Party's political philosophy. While Dell continued to publish in the Party owned *Liberator,* releasing two multi-part series of essays on marriage and then on literature, his ideas conflicted with the bevy of political editors who believed the Party would only be successful after "the present social composition of the party membership… changed and improved, that the absolute majority consists of industrial proletarians."[280] This need to change the composition of the organization signaled to radicals that living the revolution was no longer about imagining a freer world for individuals. The capitalist revolutions against the feudal world were the source for the modern concept of the soul "as separate, distinct individualities, and which expresses itself

[279] Floyd Dell, "Explanations and Apologies," *Liberator,* June 1922, 25.
[280] C.E. Ruthenberg, "Reorganization of the Workers Party," *Liberator,* October 1924, 27.

outwardly in the personality of the individual."[281] The next step in social evolution required "The birth of the soul of a social class."[282] The working class would only gain its soul through political and economic struggles. These collective experiences formed the backbone of the Party's new model of living the revolution.

The political lessons of the last few years were not the only reason communists adopted a new collective Party centered model of radicalism. Lenin's death in January 1924, caused radicals to look toward the Soviet Communist Party as one of his lasting achievements. The discussion of Lenin's legacy in the *Liberator* revealed how the individual idea persisted in Max Eastman as well. Eastman's two articles on Lenin kept to the earlier *Liberator's* model of living the revolution as a scientific radical that had an engineer like understanding of social forces. He summarized how "Lenin was the first leader of mankind who, instead of unconsciously expressing the dominant social forces of his time, analyzed those forces and understood them, and built a machine which enabled him to guide the one he believed in to its goal."[283] Science for Eastman, like Dell's idea of art, was both an end to a mean and a means in itself. A scientific understanding of political and social forces was the means of following Lenin's footsteps toward a successful revolution. At the same time, Lenin's unique ability, for Eastman, to think pragmatically, ignoring ideology and dogmas, made him a representative of the future. After the revolution, everyone would adhere to Lenin's pragmatic way of thinking. With the corrosive forces of capitalism fully exorcised, human reason would flourish because it had unobstructed access to the factual basis of reality.

While Eastman's pragmatic interpretation masked his blind adherence to Lenin, he maintained in his memoir, that despite all of the different radical identities he adopted throughout

[281] C.E. Ruthenberg, "The Birth of the Working Class Soul," *Liberator,* June 1924, 5.
[282] Ibid.
[283] Max Eastman, "The Wisdom of Lenin," *Liberator,* June 1924, 8.

his life, the war against rigidity and dogma was his one consistently motivating force.[284] His anti-dogmatism was rooted in the supremacy of the individual, which no longer fit into the Party directed period of the *Liberator.* Eastman concluded that Lenin's life, with its exemplary use of scientific knowledge and social facts, proved the individual's superiority to the masses. The intellectual should identify themselves with the workers, but should not, "bow down to the elemental instincts of the masses. Take the position of ideological and political leadership, without any false modesty or sentimental democratism..."[285] The difference between Eastman's conclusion and the Polish communist Karl Radek's ideas about Lenin also published in the *Liberator* showed the unique lessons this new revolutionary model learned from Lenin. Instead of an example of the superhuman abilities of the future man freed from dogmatic thinking, Radek explained that "The chief contribution of Lenin…who paved the way for the possession, of power by the proletariat, was his teaching of the significance of a proletarian party."[286] The centrality of the Party was Lenin's legacy, the organizational key to revolutionary change. The individuality of a radical's mind expressed either through art or scientific thinking, was of minor importance compared to the collective power of the united working class organized into a centralized Party.

In the end, the creation of this collective model of radicalism, where radicals lived the revolution through their membership to the communist party, pushed the left in an uncomfortable direction for both Eastman and Dell and spelled the end of an era they helped define for over a decade. It was not Marxism or Lenin's dictatorship of the proletarian that made them strangers to radical politics but the moving on from the individual to the collective. The situation both Dell and Eastman found themselves in by the late 1920s, increasingly estranged from Party dominated

[284] Max Eastman, *Love and Revolution,* 267-269.
[285] Ibid, 10.
[286] Karl Radek, "The Life and Work of Lenin," *Liberator,* April 1924, 14.

radical politics, reinforced Eastman's almost accidental discovery of the dilemma of the radical living through the present. In a series of essays featured in *The Masses,* chapters from what Eastman remembered as his discarded philosophical opus, he cautioned against the creation of systems of thought based on individuals' experiences in the present.[287] Turning these historically specific experiences into general theories of human behavior was doomed to irrelevance in the face of the free contingency of history.[288] How then could a radical, who by the nature of their political commitments worked to create a fundamentally different future, make sense of their experiences in present? How much of the current world would radicals carry with them into the future? If there was nothing to salvage from their experiences how could they communicate the dream of the future with others also in the present? Eastman worked his way out of this contradiction by calling on objective facts. The radical had to become like a scientist speaking through facts reaching beyond human experiences.[289]

I have argued that the larger significance of *The Masses* and the *Liberator* showed how radicals dealt with their relation to the present. Always living toward a dream of a fundamentally different future, radicals adopted historically specific models, to live in a way that invoked the freedom of the future while also influencing the movement of the entire society toward that different world. Properly contextualized Eastman's scientific attitude was itself the result of a historical model that he derived from a mixture of his pragmatic schooling which he projected onto Lenin and the Russian Revolution.[290] At the same time, the movement from one model to the next contributes to the struggle of staying a radical through a highly volatile political period. The various forms that living the revolution can take over an extended period can push some outside

[287] Max Eastman, *Enjoyment of Living,* 437-439.
[288] Max Eastman, "Toward Liberty: The Method of Progress," *The Masses,* September 1916, 28.
[289] Max Eastman, "Toward Liberty: The Aim of Agitation," *The Masses,* October 1916, 23.
[290] Christopher Irmscher, *Max Eastman: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 55.

of a political cause without the explicit rejection of the values that attracted them to radicalism, to begin with. This insight even helps to explain Eastman's move toward the libertarian right, if we accept the assumption that his defining moral and political concern was individual freedom of thought.[291] That others like Dell and Joseph Freeman stepped away from radical politics without such a dramatic political about-face is also in line with this understanding of the radical life.[292]

In the final issue of the *Liberator,* Dell concluded his thirteen-part essay series titled "Literature and the Machine Age." An attempt at literary history, Dell moved through the modern age using one author after another to elucidate some part of the human condition during that time. It is fitting that in his final piece before the Workers Party absorbed the *Liberator* completely, Dell arrived at his version of the question Eastman confronted a decade earlier in *The Masses*: "Are we, looking forward to a new world, indulging in the same kind of illusions as our eighteenth-century great grandfathers? Is this Revolution, like the last, going to bring realities different from our dreams? And are we, because of our disillusionment and chagrin, condemned to be unable to take part in the life of the new age, but destined rather to turn back and seek refuge in romantic dreams of the past?"[293] In short, Dell asked if the radical of today, given the unwritten nature of history, would always become the conservative of tomorrow. Unlike Eastman, Dell does not offer any answers, echoing his early description of love as finding oneself in "a world of accident, full of surprises, devoid of meaning, conscious only of the incongruity of my emotions with my preconceived ideas…trusting noting, very much afraid-and very curious as to what would happen next."[294] Dell unable or unwilling to reason his way out of the chaos and the questions, instead

[291] Christopher Irmscher, *Max Eastman: A Life,* 62.
[292] Alan M. Wald, *Exiles from a Future Time,* 299-306.
[293] Floyd Dell, "Literature and the Machine Age Part XIII," *Liberator,* October 1924, 29.
[294] Floyd Dell, "Private Classics," *Liberator,* January 1923, 16.

faced them with his trademark good humor. The ability to ask the question, he concluded, more than the answer itself, was a sign of progress.

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