

Lincoln Steffens --- A Tribute

A Great American Who Kept to the Road of Progress

By Sam Adams Darcy

Lincoln Steffens wore the flowing cape and pointed beard which were fashionable at the turn of the century. But his keen mind was alert to his last hours to every political and social development. He was one of those rare individuals who, despite the lack of Marxist-Leninist education only by his fearless thinking, his wonderfully human instincts, his endless groping for truth, his honesty and integrity, was able, through more than fifty years of mature life, to keep his footing on the progressive path.

Our Communist movement alone of all the great American political movements devotes a great deal of time to the schooling of its members in scientific, social theory. Yet we have seen how often, when a necessary turn of policy had to be executed to meet some new situation, some were so burdened with bourgeois ideology and were so straight-jacketed in un-Marxian dogmas that they could not make the grade and fell by the wayside, to become feed for the reactionary maw.

Of all his contemporary co-workers in literature and journalism, reform politics and foreign relations, Steffens almost alone kept to the road of progress. The rise of imperialism permanently confused some, corrupted others, and defeated many. Ida Tarbell, with whom he fought big business and Standard Oil, became a glorifier of the Rockefellers. Walter Lippmann whom he first introduced to journalism when he made him a "leg man" in his journalistic exposure of Wall Street, is now the adviser to Wall Street, albeit a pretender to occasional liberalism.

Typified American Mind of '90's

I know of no man who so well typified the American mind in the 1890's and early 1900's—its confusions and its growth—than Steffens. At 24 years of age he went to Berlin to seek culture. He wrote to his sister how intrigued he was with the "official life" and the "aristocracy," yet his observing eye could not miss other facts which he could not co-ordinate (Feb. 3, 1890):

"We have a big election on the 20th of February and it will be made the occasion of great demonstrations on the side of the Socialists. Blamarc is very anxious about the results. . . . The tendency in Germany, from which I can see and judge of, is toward a Socialistic regime. Then in April, I think, there is to be a universal strike of workmen all over Europe. . . . There seems to be a general alarm among business men about the elections on the 20th of February which they do not sufficiently explain and which I am unable to find adequate grounds for. . . . Anyway, I am interested. . . ."

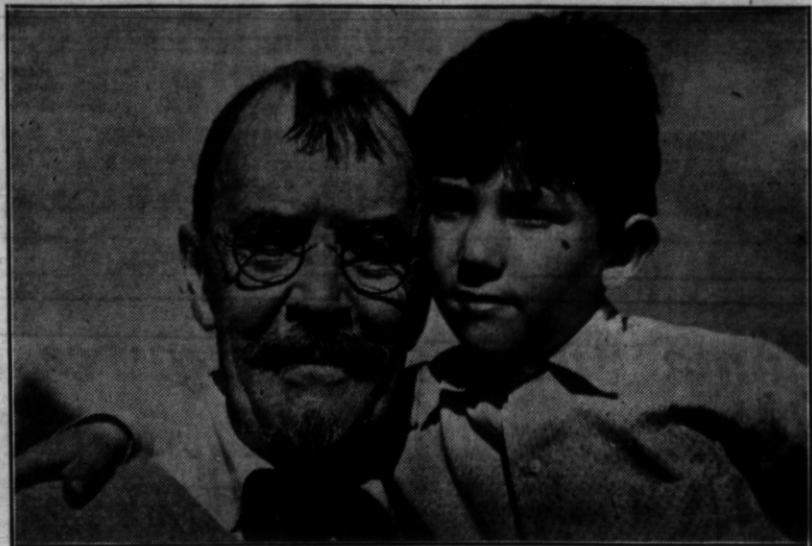
Engels, that amazingly accurate observer of American life did not know Steffens but in the very same week in which Steffens wrote the above, Engels wrote to Hoboken, to his friend Sorge, (Feb. 8, 1890), unsparringly blasting the "pig-headed and conceited" Americans who "are not to be converted by lecturing" but who "have got to experience it on their own bodies." But "now," said Engels, "without noticing it themselves, they are coming onto the right theoretical track, they drift into it . . . and this they are doing more and more every year, but they are born conservatives—just because America is so purely bourgeois, so entirely without a feudal past, and therefore proud of its bourgeois organization they will only get quit of the old traditional mental rubbish by practical experience."

Saw Close-Up of Practical Politics

From 1890 on, Steffens went through forty years of practical experience with American politics, economics and social institutions, to finally fulfill Engels' prophecy. In the last paragraph of his biography which he finished in 1930-31 he said, after stating his new credo:

"Some change in me, this? It is. I have not lived in vain. The world which I tried so hard, so honestly, so dumbly, to change has changed me. It took a war, a peace, and a couple of revolutions to do it, but it is done. My spiral-like story ends as it began: by my being thrown out of a bed by the shocks of an earthquake which has laid me out, not crying, however, but smiling."

By 1936 Steffens, one of the greatest American liberals, understood that his beloved ideals, those of Jefferson, Paine and Lincoln, which he had fondly believed were achievable in our present social order, could only be achieved in a new Socialist society. He named Lenin "the greatest of liberals." He never well knew that this was not true in the meaning of bourgeois liberalism. Steffens meant to say that he had found out that his own



The late Lincoln Steffens with his son, Peter.

humanitarian ideals could only be gained by following the path of Lenin. In his beautiful expressive symbolism he called Moscow "the capital of the future." He even sent Filene, founder of the Chamber of Commerce to go to the U.S.S.R. to see how well "the future works."

"Communism Is Scientific Cure"

In 1934, after the great San Francisco General strike in which Steffens played a noble part, he wrote to me that he felt his groping for truth had reached a positive end.

"All my long life—too long—I have been following the stink of the trail of our so-called political corruption back up from the bad politics we deplore to the good business that bought and owns our bad government: to its war and its peace; to our riches, to our poverty, vice, to our college-bred ignorance on down to the world-wide collapse from within of the whole stupid, crooked, mean economic system that we call civilization today. When the panic came in 1929, I struck the trail again to see and listen to

some of the big bosses of this big business, the men who had jeered at us muckrakers and—I found that they did not know what happened to them and us, they did not know what was wrong, what to do about it! They did not know, they do not know.

"And they want you and me to be patient—they in their comfortable riches, want you and me in out distress to stand still and take poverty and wretchedness on the chin—

"Now, all this life-time of mine when they jeered at me and my colleagues of, the muck-rake—these makers of the muck in high jest bade me report to them if I came to the end of my trail when, if ever, I found a cure and a cure for us and for them and our evils—And I promised many of them and myself that when that day came I would indeed—report.

"Well, that day has come.

"I can come down to earth, on this carefully chosen spot—before this crowd of willing listeners, to the only crowd that must act—I can come here and point out to you and to them and to all my fellow-American citi-

zens a scientific cure for all our troubles.

"It is Communism. For these United States. I mean especially for this great and successful country, at this very time of its distress and confusion, now, when we are shocked to discover that in our dumb blindness we have hit upon machinery and methods by which we can produce so much food, shelter and clothing, that we cannot distribute our abundance at a private profit—now here, where seventeen million hungry people are creating a fierce demand for all we can produce and more—exactly for America, the American Communist Party proposes a program which meets all our social problems—all—graft, ignorance, poverty and overproduction, vice and an impending war—exactly.

"Communism can solve our problem."

Praises Work of John Steinbeck

Steffens was born of pioneer stock. His father's home is now the Governor's mansion in Sacramento. All his thoughts, all his writing were for the American people. Steffens' intellectual development was of great social significance in our country. He was not an individual alone developing in an ivory tower. He influenced for varying degrees of good literally tens of thousands of people in public life. The list would fill columns—they rank from Presidents Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson to the Communist Darcy. When he turned to Communism, he influenced thousands of others to do likewise. His great contribution in taking so many, especially literary and artistic people away from their academic posing and futile vapors and bringing them into the service of the American masses is only now, in the perspective years, beginning to be fully appreciated. Even in his last years, he was always nursing a dozen young authors and helping, by correspondence and occasional discussions hundreds of others. On Feb. 25, 1936 he wrote as he had scores of other times from his home in Carmel, California.

"We have developed a new and promising author in this neighborhood. His name is John Steinbeck."

Those of us who knew Steffens' expressions and the nuances of his thought can recognize the tremendous influence that Steffens had on Steinbeck, influence which helped him to become the great outstanding American author that he is today. The many who have loved Steffens and admire Steinbeck, must wish, as I do, that Steinbeck would continue, as he is doing, to carry forward that tradition.

Having lived a long, vigorous and rich life, Steffens mind at the time of death was clearer, more capable of great work than at any time before. But while his brain was still so clear and vigorous, his body succumbed. It was a great loss to America. On Jan. 4, 1936, he had written that he was planning to "write a third volume to my book." It was to be a volume dedicated to explaining to his fellow-Americans why they should follow him into the Communist movement.

Many, many people whom he influenced have a part of Steffens in themselves, so to say. This spirit, the devotion he gave to the American people, his Americanism, is influencing directly and through those he taught millions of young Americans for progress, against fascism and reaction.

That is as the modest, thoughtful, lovable Steffens would have liked it.

Change of Policy at 2nd Avenue Theatre

For nearly a quarter of a century, the home of operettas and musical comedies, the Second Avenue Theatre, now announces a change of policy for the coming season. Under the direction of Michael Rosenberg, Judah Bleich and Wolf Barzel, former stalwarts of the Yiddish Art Theatre, this playhouse during the coming season will present plays dealing with Jewish-American life.

Czechoslovakian Music Featured at Stadium

Fourth from the last of the Stadium Concert series, the Czechoslovakian concert tomorrow evening, Aug. 12, is expected to bring one of the largest audiences of the season to the Lewisohn Stadium. New York has a Czechoslovakian population considerably in excess of 100,000, and many strong Czech-American societies

which under the leadership of Dr. Gerald Machacek, President of the Czechoslovak Societies of the United States, are carrying news of the concert into every Czech community, urban and suburban. In recognition of the fact that this is the first time in 22 years that an all-Czechoslovakian program has been given in the Lewisohn Stadium, the Czechoslovakian Minister to the United States, Hon. Vjladimir Hruban, and Mrs. Hruban will come from Washington to attend and many other distinguished Czechoslovakians visiting at present in the United States, including the sisters of Mrs. Thomas G. Masaryk, American wife of Czechoslovakia's first president, have been invited to be honor guests.

Josef Blant, the youthful conductor, 36 years old, is interrupting a vacation in Maine to make his debut for Stadium audiences in this concert. Zlatko Balacovic, violinist, soloist of the occasion, is also summing in Maine, and will make a special trip to New York for the concert.

Popularize Folk Music

Both soloist and conductor are devotees of Czech music. Mr. Balacovic was educated almost ex-

clusively by Czech teachers and is an intimate of the family of the late President Masaryk. Mr. Blant, a boy prodigy who began his career as a pianist at three, and as a conductor at 19, has spent almost his entire conductorial life in the opera houses of Liberec, Teplitz, Brno and Prague. He is enthusiastic over the prospect of an all-Czechoslovakian program for the Stadium, believing that it will do much to popularize a native music distinctly of folk origin, yet of unusual vivacity, warmth and appeal. Saturday evening's program is chosen from the two Czech composers best known outside of their native country, Dvoiak and Smetana, the latter of whom was regarded by the late Mrs. Masaryk as so pre-eminent the finest musical interpreter of the spirit of Czechoslovakia that she wrote articles and books containing exhaustive analyses of his music.

The selections will be Smetana's "Tabor," which will be heard for the first time at the Stadium; the same composer's "The Moldau," descriptive of the river that flows through Prague; the overture to Smetana's opera, "The Bartered Bride"; Dvorak's Violin Concerto in A minor, played by Mr. Balacovic, and Dvorak's symphony, "From the New World."

THE WORLD IS THEIRS



Voskovec and Werich, exiled Czechoslovakian actors, will appear in the lead roles of "The World Is Ours," a political satire which makes its American premiere at the World Theatre, Saturday, August 12th.