
God, the Supreme Shoe Manufacturer

by Robert Minor

Published in *The New Magazine*, Feb. 27, 1926, pp. 1-2.
Supplement to *The Daily Worker*, vol. 3, no. 40 (Feb. 27, 1926).

Anthony Bimba, Communist editor, is on trial at Brockton, Mass., for having told a gathering of shoe workers that there is no god. Bimba is also on trial under the charge of seditious utterance, because he is said to have told the shoe workers that the most intelligent, courageous, and aggressive workers ought to join the Workers (Communist) Party. But the tremendous sensation that is now blazoned in the headlines of the capitalist newspapers of Massachusetts is based on the fact the Communist editor is being prosecuted in the greatest of all factory towns, for denying the existence of the greatest of all shoe manufacturers — to wit: God, otherwise Jehovah, the Almighty, maker of not only shoes, but also of men, women, hats, coats, dogs, cows, monkeys, and bacteria — in short, the Supreme Manufacturer of all things, who even made, so they say, the smaller shoe manufacturers of Brockton in his own very image.

We must remember that Massachusetts is a very pious state. The great Roman Catholic Church has a little kingdom of its own there, with Boston the seat of the mighty prince of the church of god, Cardinal [William Henry] O'Connell. Then there is the Protestant Episcopal Church, with its own little kingdom, and there also, in Boston, is the seat of that other powerful church of Christian Science, founded by the Holy Lady, Mrs. [Mary Baker] Eddy — and there is the stronghold of Theosophy, and Spiritualism, and New Thought, Unitarianism, Ethical Culture, and all of the other variations of ideas of the Supreme Manufacturer.

It is said that the Roman Catholic Cardinal and his priests are especially interesting themselves in the effort to put the blasphemer in jail. But at the same time the judge and the prosecutor are members of the Unitarian Church, which varies from most other churches in

that it denies that the Supreme Manufacturer has a superintendent and foreman known respectively as the Holy Ghost and Jesus Christ.

All the cohorts of god are assembled in a united front to put Bimba, the blasphemer, in a little stone cell.

An old law, 230 years old, enacted in the year 1696, is the law under which Bimba is prosecuted. The fact that this old law, enacted at the time when Massachusetts was a colony and was steadily burning witches, and which in its first form imposed the death penalty for atheists, is the only thing which tends to break the united front of the bourgeois community by splitting off the “liberal” section of the bourgeoisie, which does not like to uphold what are called the “blue laws.”

But it is pointed out by the prosecutors that the old “blue law” has been reenacted in recent times, long after the burning of witches had ceased and after the Supreme Manufacturer had changed his ways and had inspired the setting up of the United Shoe Machinery Company’s appliances. This is as it should be. God has to be protected, not only in a colonial village, but also in a modern factory.



Why must the human shoe manufacturers of Massachusetts preserve the belief of the shoe workers in the Supreme Manufacturer in Heaven?

The question almost answers itself.

Shoe workers must believe in the Divine Shoe Manufacturer of Heaven because it helps to make them believe in the mortal shoe manufacturers of Brockton.

The shoe manufacturers of Brockton have to have god. Those who have inquired into these forbidden matters know that god has undergone many changes, and with every change he has adapted his character exactly to suit the character of the ruling classes of the earth at the particular time — and always in each country to the particular ruling class of that country. With the breakup of feudalism, god was transformed from a feudal warrior into a rotund burger. With the coming of the factory system, god shaved off his beard, put on a white vest and spats, and became the best of all businessmen, keeping books and exploiting labor for surplus value.

When the Communist editor was brought to trial, the prosecutor declared that “the people must be protected in their belief in god.”

Yes, it is necessary, from the point of view of the manufacturing interests, to make the “people” (that is, the working people) believe in some variation of the god myth. Or at least, to make them see the whole of the universe in the form which has a supreme authority at the top. that is necessary in order that the working masses will feel that it is “natural” to have a superior class at the top of earthly affairs, owning the social machinery of production and distribution, ruling, exploiting, and judging the propertyless workers, even as “God” is supposed to rule, to exploit and to judge the entirety of human kind. Human kind is supposed to be made “in the image of God” — but the fact is that god is created (as a mythical figure) in the image of the kings and emperors, and, in later days, in the image of our own Rockefellers and Morgans.

And God always changes with the system of exploitation.

At the present time of tremendous change — or rather in the period which is now nearing its end, the last stage of capitalism — many changes in the forms of religious belief are to be seen. We see an inconceivable number of weird and semi-“rational” religious forms spring up. we even notice that parallel to the effort to establish a single mighty world oligarchy, as shown among other things in the League of Nations and World Court, a recent effort is being made to crate a “universal religion.” And some big Jewish financiers are fostering an effort to reconcile the Jewish and Christian faiths. Among petty bourgeois philosophers we find a renewed growth of “agnosticism” — the effort to find a pseudo-rational basis without positively denying the existence of “God,” but saying, “I don’t know,” and thereby evading the matter. “Agnostics” are only a variation of the cult of capitalism which does not dare to conceive of a form of society which has no ruling, propertied class, and therefore, does not dar conceive clearly of a universe which has no ruling, all-owning God above. The agnostic sees the universe in the same form as that in which it is seen by the believer in god — he sees the world as a pyramid with the exploited masses below, but says the pyramid leads so high in the clouds that he cannot see whether there is a god on top of it or “something else.”

• • • • •

But the “blasphemer” in this case is a Communist. His conception of the universe is that of historical materialism. To the Commu-

nist view, the marxian view, the universe is not a reflection of the passing forms of social institutions, with a great mass of perpetually enslaved men at the bottom, under a monstrous pyramid of authority above. The Marxian, the Communist view of the universe absolutely excludes all such questions as the existence of a god. The Marxian is therefore not an “agnostic,” but an atheist. He seeks to throw down the system of exploitation and of rule over the masses by a superior human ruling class. He foresees clearly a society in which there will be no superior human authority, and he does not build a mystic image of “divine authority” in mimicry of the human rulers. The dictatorship of the proletariat is not reflected in a mystic system. The Marxian knows that system of superior authority in society is a temporary, not an eternal system, and his scientific materialist philosophy becomes a powerful instrument in his hands to bring about that change. He knows that with the disappearance of a class society, with the disappearance of all necessity for state authority (even, finally, the disappearance of the need of the working class state authority), there will inevitably disappear also all forms of religious belief, all concepts of the rule over mankind by a mystic image of human rulers.

The Marxian, the Communist, helps to free the working class of the superstitious conception of the universe, thereby helping the workers to direct their energies toward the liberation from the rule of the capitalist class. Anthony Bimba is therefore hailed to court as a blasphemer.

But the tremendous changes that are going on in the material basis of production are reflected at this time by a stirring and unrest even in the bourgeois world’s religious forms. Contradictions within the capitalist system bring conflicts such as the “evolution trial” at Dayton, Tennessee. The rapid industrialization of the backward Southern states brings the conflict to establish the variations of religious superstition that are better adapted to the exploitation of workers in scientifically run factories.

The trial of Bimba is in a certain degree another “Dayton, Tennessee.”

But the trial of Bimba is also different from the trial at Dayton. The Dayton case was defended from the point of view of pseudo-rational variations of religious superstition which try to reconcile to themselves the revolutionizing science of Darwin. The Dayton trial was an example of the wavering and evasive contortions of “agnosticism,” which seek, not to undermine “divine” authority, but to shift it

to a more protected base. But in the trial of Bimba in Brockton, there is no such evasion.

Bimba denied the Supreme manufacturer, and all of the little shoe manufacturers of Massachusetts, and their priests and preachers and ethical culturists strike at Bimba in vengeance.

In this trial the revolutionary worker, Bimba, does not ask the bourgeoisie to accept the revolutionary materialist philosophy — an impossible thought — but insist upon exercising the right of free speech which the capitalist “democracy” pretends to give even to the working class.

From this trial of the Communist editor the workers should learn a great deal about the ideological superstructure of bourgeois society which helps to keep the workers blinded for slavery.

Edited by Tim Davenport

1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR · January 2014 · Non-commercial reproduction permitted.