

Communist Party and Socialist Party

The Use of the Ballot

THE Socialist Party depends entirely for working-class gains upon electing representatives to public offices, these representatives to formulate and support various kinds of occupational, political, and social reform measures.

The Communist Party does not carry on a propaganda of reforms, most of which are of no real benefit to the workers, but simply mean better methods of capitalist domination. The Communist Party carries on the propaganda of the class struggle, pointing out all the time that in this struggle the only real victory for the working-class as a class is the attainment of complete political control. That is, the workers must have such control that they can change the entire character of the laws and political institutions so as to make an end of the profit system and to set up a workers' administration of industry.

The Communist Party declares that the working-class can never obtain this control through the channels of the capitalist legislatures. The Communist Party brands as a rank fraud the Socialist pretense that this can be done by piling up many reform measures.

The Communist Party looks upon the present government of the United States as a weapon of the capitalist class, against the working-class. The economic power of the capitalist class, with the banking houses of Wall Street at the apex, is the power which controls this government and directs its use against the working-class. But this is more than a temporary circumstance, more than a matter of popular neglect (in which sense Woodrow Wilson speaks of this control of the government in his "New Freedom.") It is a control which is inherent in the capitalist system, a control which is bound to persist so long as the game is played according to the rules of capitalist "democracy."

The world war was fought to make the world safe for capitalist democracy. The class war must be fought to make the world safe for proletarian democracy. There can be no democracy which means anything to the working-class until the workers get into a position where they can possess themselves of the railroads, the factories, the mines, the mills and the forests. Economic power is superior to political power. It dictates the entire character and operation of the political government.

The fundamental nature of the American government has been from the beginning a reflex of the economic power of American Capitalism. Our democracy is a rule against the working-class.

The Communist Party, unlike the Socialist Party, faces this situation squarely and openly. The Socialist say: "Yes, it is true that the government is the powerful weapon of the ruling class. That has been true of all governments since one group in society has been able to compel slave or wage service from another group. But we will try to change the government first, then we can use the government against the capitalists."

How change the government? By use of the ballot. In actual practice the So-

cialist method comes down to this: to change the government according to the rules of capitalist democracy. In other words, to beat the capitalists with their own loaded dice.

The Communists say: "The working-class has not a ghost of a chance to win the class fight through the capitalist government, nor even to win a first-class skirmish in this way. What the workers must do is so to organize themselves and so to direct their mass power that they can overwhelm both the economic and political power of the ruling class. This organized working-class power cannot be developed within the capitalist frame of government but outside of it. The political organization of the workers must correspond to the actual circumstances under which the workers now find themselves. It must be something new, something growing out of the circumstances at hand. It cannot be the sickly aping of regular capitalist politics which has disheartened the workers who have put faith in reform socialism. It must be an organization based on the politics of revolution; that is, the politics which challenges the capitalist system in its entirety"

Take the Triple Alliance of England, the alliance of the powerful unions of the railroad workers, the miners and the transport workers. These unions develop out of the immediate circumstances of the work in the mines, on the docks and in the railroad shops. The combined power of the workers in three such unions is something capable of being pitted against the power of British Capitalism entrenched in the British Government.

The threat of a strike on the part of the Railway Brotherhoods in this country compelled the capitalist Congress to adopt the Adamson law as a means of granting the workers' demands.

Such organized power of the workers, which may take on many forms, when directed to the goal of winning for the workers the complete political power which enables the workers to take over industry, finance and the natural resources of the country, is Communism in action. The development of such organizations and the simultaneous development of the understanding on the part of the workers of the class struggle in its fullest sense is the immediate process of Communism. The organizations come as the necessary response to the job needs of the workers. The understanding of the workers must be developed by Communist education.

Do the Communists disavow the use of the ballot? No. They declare that the ballot, under capitalist democracy, is not a weapon which can win for the workers fundamental victories. But the political campaigns and the legislative forums offer excellent opportunities for Communist agitation. These campaigns present the opportunity to analyze the programs of the other parties, whether Democratic, Republican, Socialist, Labor or Non-Partisan, and to show how any and all of these programs fail to meet the real issues which face the working-class. These campaigns, and the legis-

latures, can be used for the propaganda of the revolutionary class struggle. (The Communist Party makes absolutely definite its use of the elections for propaganda purpose only by limiting nominations to legislative offices, thereby emphasizing the point that it does not seek any part in the administration of the capitalist government).

There can be no possible objection to the use of the ballot, except that it be used in a way to deceive the workers into false expectations. This is the way of the Socialist and Labor Parties, which lead the workers to expect a transformation of the social system by casting votes according to the rules of capitalist democracy. It is only in a workers' kind of government that the ballot becomes a real exercise of democracy to the worker. In the capitalist government there are hundreds of devices within the scheme of government and by outside economic pressure or bribery, by which the vote is nullified. In the workers' government, such as now exists in Russia, there is nothing to thwart the workers' vote. There is no powerful group of financiers and monopolists to pull the strings attached to governmental puppets, as is now the case in the United States.

The supreme delusion of the Socialists has been that the proletariat actually has an overwhelming majority of the votes. The actual fact in the United States today is that not more than 25% of the 30,000,000 wageworkers can cast a ballot, not more than 7,500,000; while the recipients of profits, fees, salaries, etc., have an effective voting strength of about 12,000,000. Non-citizenship, disqualification of negroes, residential disqualification, and age limitations dispose of over 75% of the wage-earners as voters.

The most solid group of voters is the farmer group of 6,000,000 owners and tenants. This group is over 90% native born, nearly 100% citizens and voters. The farmers, except for the few real insurgents, vote with the same regularity and enlightenment with which they go to church; by the same rules of routine and tradition which their ancestors transmitted to them, and with a jealousy of small property notions which makes them a social anachronism. (Even the Non-Partisans, who still go no farther than to make a choice between the Republican and Democratic candidates, are only distinctive in their special concern for farmer advantages as against the other economic groups, labor included.)

Consider the 6,500,000 farm laborers by contrast. Most all of these are floaters, aliens or disfranchised negroes; and, at the very best, it is inconceivable that any method might be found to bring these scattered laborers into effective class-conscious voting groups.

This sort of contrast can be shown all along the line as between the bourgeois and petty bourgeois (capitalist and small property owner) voting strength and that of the proletariat (the wage-workers). It will be found that the only real

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