

Birth of Labor Party.

ACCORDING to all that has appeared in our Left Wing and Communist literature about the counter-revolutionary role of Laborism it would appear that we ought to greet the birth of a National Labor Party as a grimly evil portent. But no. We are calm. We do not see, as in a nightmare, the advent of the power which is to be our undoing.

It was not a birth, but a still-birth.

Theory must not lose its touch with reality, else it becomes empty dogma. We have seen the role of Laborism in Europe under one test and another. We have seen Laborism (often under the name of Socialism) come into partial or complete power only to betray the hopes and aspirations of the working class, in the cabinets of France, Australia, England, Belgium and in other countries. We have seen the whole movement of labor reformism turned directly against the proletarian revolution—when there was no other effective power to stem the tide of working class revolt and triumph.

Why not the same role for Social Reformism, for Social Patriotism—for Socialist-Laborism—in the United States? The theory is compelling; inherent in labor reformism, with its acceptance of the capitalist state as the avenue for working class emancipation, is all of the betrayal and the tragic reactionism which has occurred in other countries. Laborism presents the perfect program for the State Capitalism which is now needed as the political basis for finance-imperialism. There is complacent capitalistic acquiescence in the starting of such a party in the United States, and we may rest assured that there will be no more strenuous opposition than is needed for the purposes of sham battles of a political game where nothing more is at stake than the spoils of office for the professionals who keep up the show. So far as theory goes we might already draw the picture of a Sheidemann-Bauer-Noske-Kautsky-Hindenburg "democracy" in the United States.

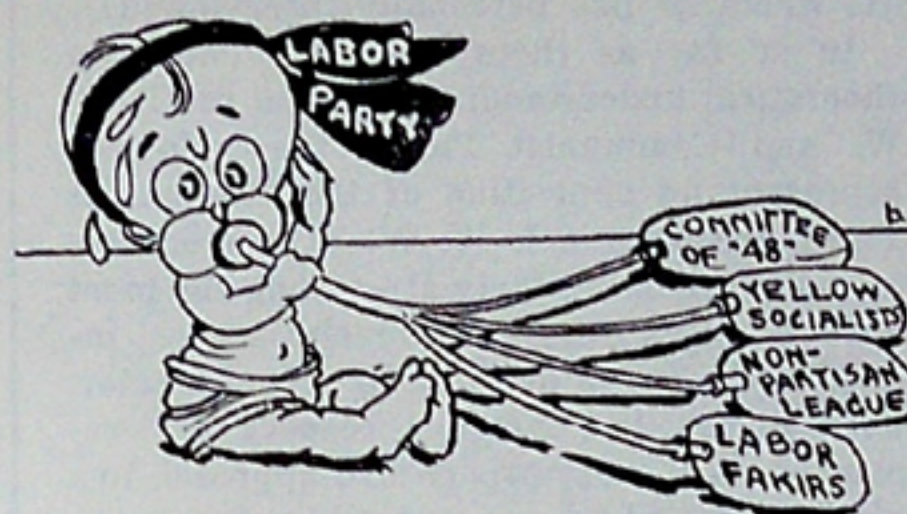
But the realities to which our theorizing is now to be applied are vastly changed. The world of the generation preceding 1914 has given way to the new historical era ushered in on November 7th, 1917. The emergence of Socialist-Laborism in the United States in 1919 cannot mechanically be given the perspective of the pre-revolutionary period. Two years after the proletarian victory in Russia, and one year after the abysmal betrayal of the revolutionary working class by the Social Democracy of Germany, the coming of a Labor Party into the field in the United States need excite little uneasiness of a backward swing of the pendulum of our labor movement.

Most pointedly, the fact that the Labor Party arrives after the breakup of the Socialist Party in this country, after the issues have already been projected of the inherent reactionism of Socialist-Laborism, signifies a tremendously reduced possibility of fooling the workers. Communist propaganda is already firmly entrenched in a strong separate organization. There is no longer the pre-war condition of revolutionary Socialism silenced by the official party expression of parliamentary reformism as the sum total of Socialism. Laborism and Socialism together, having arrived at a singleness of program and practice, must now make headway against the assertive challenge of Communism—when Communism, in its first great Russian triumph, has already gripped the hearts of the toilers everywhere!

The workers of the United States begin to

understand that the experiences of labor in Europe mean something to us here. The inspiration for the Labor Party here is the Labor Party of England, and the most superficial reading of the English press shows that Laborism has now become the real party of Liberalism. The merger between Laborites and Liberals has already made great headway. Arthur Henderson is the personification of this new Socialist-Labor-Liberalism: the creed of class peace, labor reformism, kindly imperialism and rigorous anti-Bolshevism. Arthur Henderson is as safe for British finance-imperialism and British landlordism as was Kerensky for the same interests in Russia, as is Wilson in the United States, or as would be any of our Progressives, Laborites or Socialists.

American labor is bound to be more impressed by the Triple Alliance, with its strong trend toward "direct action", temporarily held in check by Trade Union leaders of the Gompers-Lewis variety. Nothing will come out of Parliament to make the Labor Party noticeable, except as it adds to the proofs that it is "safe for democracy."



Even where there are well-established Labor-Parties, or strong Socialist parties of identical character, the workers are no longer looking to the legislative assemblies for the realization of their demands. Mass action is their real dependence.

But the assertion that the new Labor Party is still-born and impotent is not based so much on the surmise that our workers will take to heart the European lessons as upon certain outstanding circumstances which surround the launching of the new political venture.

Political Laborism is the counterpart of Trade Unionism, and it is strikingly apparent that official Trade Unionism is rapidly losing its hold on its own membership and is frantically engaged in trying to prevent and stop the membership action. It is not unlikely that wholesale expulsions may even be attempted, as in the case of the Socialist Party with its rebels, with the Railroad Brotherhoods as the initiators of such a policy. It is hardly likely that this is a time when Trade Unionists, somewhat more aggressive than the central A. F. of L. bureaucracy but of the same fundamental viewpoint, can make themselves the mild political leaders of a membership goaded to a new militancy.

Think of an appeal for democratism presented to American labor at the moment when the whole governmental power which is to be constitutionally reformed, item by item, one step at a time, is turned directly against the pitiable demands for living wages and human hours of toil—courts, executive departments, Congress, army, all in perfect teamwork. And "the public" voices almost uniform approval in the tens of thousands of newspapers and magazines reaching every nook of the country. It is precisely this organized opinion which is to be reckoned with in the voting game. It is this "public opinion" which is the entire basis of Labor-Democratism, a belief that somehow all the intermediary elements can be politically joined against the big financiers—and at the same time that all the demands of each sec-

tion of the conglomerate group can be fulfilled by common action. But now the truth is being driven in upon the working class that it must rely upon itself alone, and upon its own direct modes of action; and that there is nothing for it along the "public opinion" route, with "changed faces" in Congress, and countless intricacies of statutory amendments, which amount to nothing when the score is counted.

In the face of the existing situation in the coal strike, think how exhilarating to the miners, how wonderfully convincing, will be the wordy resolution of the Labor Party Convention "demanding" the impeachment of Judge Anderson! Everybody knows that this is the sheerest nothingness of empty words. Can there be patience with such word-bubbles when labor faces a life and death combat? The only politics the working class will now take seriously is the politics of working class action through its own organs of power, the politics of sovietism and proletarian dictatorship.

In a word, the class lines are already too firmly drawn for relaxation through Laborism. A crisis has been reached when the masses are no longer to be deceived by the wordy nothingness of democracy within capitalism. The class struggle drives relentlessly on to the test of mass power against entrenched class power.

Consider the Labor Convention itself. Every brand of reformism was represented, from that of the genteel and scholarly Forty-Eight to that of the ex-Socialists, duly accredited by their treason to their own advocacies of so many years. The Non-Partisan Leaguers joined hands with the Laborites just at the time when the former organizations generally are missing no opportunity to voice their bitter jealousy of aggressive labor, even in its regulation and demands.

The official organ of the new party proudly quotes the comment of one reporter that this was the first convention he ever attended where there was not some kind of dispute about the seating of delegates. There was neither test of principle nor of distinct representation of some social group or interest. The trick is to hold together as many conflicting political philosophies as possible, representing as many conflicting social interests; to merge as great a hodge-podge as possible into acceptance of as vaguely comprehensive a program as possible. The vague phrases cover up the real selfish interests of the various groups, each of which is confident that it can use the others to its special advantage. All of this is not necessarily conscious; it is the inevitable character of small-middle-class politics, jealous alike of dominant capital and of its own inter-group advantages, united only loosely and purely defensively,—equally against the finance oligarchy and against the revolutionary proletariat,—inherently incapable of any program except that of the status quo, except that of trying to hold things in balance, ignoring the inevitable forces compelling progress through revolution.

The Liberal forty-eight, seeking a new weapon with which to lull militant labor into democratic repose, and the traitor-Socialists, instinctively coming into the alignment which might have stood as the greatest barrier against the proletarian revolution in the United States, will do their utmost to prepare this organized reactionism of the lower strata of the bourgeoisie. But, fortunately, their undertaking comes too late in history to have any chance for success.