

# "HAS IT BEEN WORTH WHILE?"

## HAS IT BEEN WORTH WHILE?

By Y. F.

**Editor's Note:** We print this article as an expression of the "theoretical background" of the position of the "minority"; the author is the leading theoretician of that group. Following this article will be found a critical analysis by one of the editors.

After seven months of existence of the Communist Party can we say whether it has been a success or a failure? There must be tests of the worthwhileness of a party, just as there are tests of the success of other enterprises. A Communist Party does not simply happen; it is made by collective volition. It may be well made and it may be bungled. There is a social evolution which accounts for the appearance of a Communist party at a given epoch of history. But there is nothing about that evolution which foreordains whether any particular attempt to build such a party will be good, bad or indifferent.

It is important at the outset of this discussion to insist upon this objective attitude toward the Communist Party. We have suffered a great deal to the detriment of the Communist movement in this country by the imposition of a religious attitude of fatal inevitability upon the whole process. A few undefined slogans have served like hallelujahs at a revivalist meeting. Hell has gaped before us in all its fearfulness, even more terrifying than the portrayals by Billy Sunday, the hell of being the minutest fraction under one hundred percent Bolshevik. To escape this fearful peril most of us have been consistently more than one hundred percent Bolshevik—somewhat to the left of the left of the Left Communists of other countries.

Of course someone will answer: this is what the Right Wingers said about us a year ago; if it is true now, why was it not true then? It is true now; it was true then. But the Right Wingers used this sarcasm not to characterize a particular phase of the revolutionary Socialist movement in this country. They aimed their shafts at revolutionary Socialism itself.

What has dominated the Communist movement in the United States up to this time may be rescribed as the big bluff of Bolshevism. The process has been a perfect parallel to Joseph Smith's discovery of the tablets upon which were revealed the eternal truths of Mormonism. Joseph Smith secured many followers for his schemes of colonization because there were many ready for so fortunate a combination of spiritual and economic adventure. A ready-made Bolshevism was superimposed in this country upon a Left Wing movement of many years standing. The adventure element—with revolution in process in Russia, in Germany, in Hungary—was so alluring that none stopped for questioning or analysis. There were, to be sure, the scoffing Right Wingers, but their concern was not the better progress but the destruction of the Left Wing movement. There were the critics from Detroit, the Proletarian University group of Marxian students, but their criticism was ineffective because of its contemptuous manner of presentation and, fundamentally, because their criticism was not responsive to the true vitality of the Left Wing movement.

In May 1910 there was the discovery that there was a Left Wing within the Socialist Party which could control the party. Immediately upon this discovery came the expulsion of a majority of the Socialist Party membership by the Right Wing executive officers. Within a few months appeared the Communist Party.

But just as the Communist Party emerged from its cocoon came a new discovery. The Communists were not the Left Wingers of the Socialist Party, but spurned this Left Wing along with the rest of the Socialist Party!

The Communists, lo and behold, were the bearers of a new revelation! And ever since the Summer of 1910 we have had an official Communism in the United States which proceeds by incantations, counting of beads, salaams to the East, jubilees of phrases and slogans, pieties unending to Bolshevism—to a Bolshevism consisting of a mysterious compound of words and ritual which could only be known to its high priests!

The supreme high priests of this new revelation had seen the divine flame with their own eyes. They had been in Russia. Many years ago, perhaps, in a world of circumstances only dimly akin to those of 1910 in the United States,

but—they had been in Russia. They had witnessed the tablets, almost had they seen the writing of the new scriptures—they had been in Russia. And who dared to say them nay?

The Communist Labor Party came into being alongside the Communist Party as the confused protest of the Left Wing against its absorption into this religiosity of word-Bolshevism. There has been the persistent voice of protest within the Communist Party, but it has been officially stifled.

We must take a reckoning of the seven months, of our efforts and their results. We must consider the Communist Party as an organ of the class struggle in the United States, not as an institution for the holding of ritualistic incantations to the Russian Revolution. And what do we find?

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The accident of the suspension of seven Federations of the Socialist Party at one stroke, most of them Russian-speaking, threw these Federations together into a provisional highly-centralized organization which gave a handful of persons complete control of the Left Wing. This control has been used in such manner by the Federation politicians that the Communist movement in the United States has gone BACKWARD since June 1919, and is presently yoked with a miserable heritage of internal factional and personal squabbles which will require much patient effort to overcome.

This is a most serious charge to make against men who call themselves Communists. It is a charge of almost unbelievable pettiness and vanity during months of the most heroic struggle and sacrifice by Communists in all countries. It is not a question of good intentions or good motives. The net result of the Federation leadership has been an absolute pushing backward of the revolutionary Socialist movement in the United States. If this is the truth it must be faced as the truth. It means that in addition to all other difficulties we have lost ground to regain, but defeats are only disastrous when we fail to acquire a new wisdom and a new determination out of them.

The Left Wing Conference of last June was really the starting of a new party. The overwhelming representation at that Conference was of membership expelled or about to be expelled from the Socialist Party. It became apparent almost as soon as the Conference opened that there was a strong minority opposed to any further efforts within the Socialist Party, though it was obvious that the Conference did not include within itself all the Left Wing elements in the old party.

Just what was involved for the furtherance of Communism in America in the formal establishment of a Communist Party at one precise date or another, just what was involved for Communism in the inauguration of the new party by one form of campaign rather than another—this has not been made clear even until today. But on June 22d, 1919, it became Centrism not to favor the formal establishment of a Communist Party on June 22d. The pronouncement to this effect had not been announced on June 21st, so that many found themselves transformed overnight from Bolsheviks to Centrists.

But the Federation caucus met again and lifted the ban of excommunication as against all who would at once join a new party call for September first. But this call must be just as dictated; particularly it must take no account of the Socialist Party (of which many of the delegates were still members. Purity in Bolshevism had shifted from June 22d to September 1st, but the shift in dates was not a response to the demand that the process of Left Wing development within the Socialist Party be taken into consideration. It was an admission that September 1st was just as good as June 22d for the formal announcement of a Communist Party, but the insistence was that Bolshevism prescribed in June just what must occur in September, regardless of intermediate developments.

It is assuredly not the desire at this date to quarrel with the fact of the starting of the Communist Party at any particular time. What is here pointed out is a different illustration of the arbitrary "logic" of pseudo-Bolshevism which has held the Communist Party in its grip ever since its inception. The Centrists of June became perfectly good Bolsheviks the moment they were

brought into adjustment with this calendar test, no matter what they may have thought about any of the fundamental principles of Communism. The "Centrist swamp" of July and August was "rehabilitated" as the perfect expression of Bolshevism during the first week of September. The perfect Bolsheviks of July and August (the Michiganders) became counter-revolutionary Mensheviks at some unrecorded hour on the 6th or 7th of September, when their usefulness in the fight to "conquer" the Left Wing had ended. In other words, when the Federation politicians had assured themselves of control of the new party.

All of the English-speaking elements in both the Communist and Communist Labor conventions were reduced to an absurdity by the Federation caucus. One feature of the Communist Party Convention which will leave a bad taste for some time to come was the cheap cynicism about the revolutionary worthlessness of all the English-speaking elements in America.

Just why some of us did not carry out our initial impulse to leave this Convention is a perplexity which can only be explained to-day by the big bluff of Bolshevism. The writer has resolved never to enter either the Communist or the Left Wing Conventions, being deterred on the one hand by hopeless arbitrariness and on the other by hopeless confusion. The Left Wing Council had accepted the September 1st call for a Communist convention because it was obviously supported by the overwhelming majority of the Left Wing membership. It seemed that this was the forum in which to fight against domination of an aggressive, active, hopeful membership by a small clique of vain politicians. Once in Communist convention, there appeared no escape from the dilemma except a Left Wing conquest of the Communist Party.

The "unity" issue which has been in the forefront of Communist discussion since last August has epitomized the fundamental conflict in our ranks. The "federation question" has only been a subterfuge for the revolt against exotic domination of the Communist movement in this country. There has been no idea of attacking the federations as units of foreign-language organization and agitation. Only the demagogic Russian and Jewish nationalists have had the requisite pettiness to insinuate that there is prejudice against "foreigners" as such within the American Left Wing movement. It is only the remoteness of our phrase-Bolshevism from the class struggle in America against which there is resentment, and it is this resentment which has directed itself against the federations as an instrument of intrigue, not against federations as organs of propaganda.

Now we approach more directly the work of the Communist Party itself.

(End of first installment which the author promises to continue.)

## "HAROLD LORD VARNEY" OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

(THE POLITICAL OBITUARY OF Y. F.—"COMMUNIST")

BY A—W.

I.

The laurels won by Harold Lord Varney, former chief editor and "theoretician" of the I. W. W., who published a sensational article in the New York World on February 8th of this year—in which he denounced "the gods whom he had worshipped before and extolled the gods whom he had previously denounced," by proclaiming his conversion to the "capitalist faith,"—aroused the envy of Y. F.,—also a former editor, but who still remains the "theoretician" of the present "minority group" of the Communist Party of America. So he also decided to immortalize his name by the same great deed.

The article of Y. F., which is printed in this issue of the Communist under the significant title "HAS IT BEEN WORTH WHILE" (that is, has it been worth while to organize the Communist Party of America) is a certain means to the attainment of such immortalization, being unquestionably the political obituary of its author as a Communist.

It is true that in this first article (at the end of which the reader is encouraged by a promise of its continuation) he does not attack Communism with the same frank vehemence and malice as does his colleague Varney against