

The Socialist Party and the Prospects for Communism

By ARNE SWABECK

In various sections of the country the Socialist Party has during the last few months been unfolding a greater activity than hitherto. It is attempting, and with some success, to plant its roots in the present favorable soil of mass unemployment. In inverted form it becomes a testimonial to the fact that among the American workers there are now visible trends toward the shaping of a class movement.

The Socialist Party is very consciously "radicalizing" in phraseology its general slogans and platform demands, although the fact that all references to the class struggle have long since been obliterated from its program is momentarily glossed over. The object is clearly to head off the working class movement, to prevent its natural development towards a revolutionary position and to harness it within "safe" reformist channels, in order ultimately to strike the blows of defeat. The capitalist political strategists of the somewhat moderate type, will not be slow in taking advantage, for their own purposes, of this situation and help push the S. P. forward to extend its influence and thus enable it to fulfill that role. These are ominous signs for the future. But firstly, success for such designs have to count with the tempo of growing working class consciousness which may become so accelerated as to confine the reformist ideology to a rather brief period. Secondly, much depends upon the degree to which the Communist movement can establish its mass influence.

The S. P. and the Middle Class

Whom does the Socialist Party represent and of whom are its ranks composed? In the United States it has by no means established the traditional influence upon working class ideology or the broad mass organization enjoyed by the social democracy in the foremost European countries. In fact it became almost obliterated by the 1919 split which resulted in the founding of the Communist movement. Ever since, its existence has been a rather obscure one, finding scant support largely from the lower middle class strata with a sprinkling of immigrant trade union officialdom. Today the hard pressed middle class, in its lower sections, the small business and professional man, becoming "radicalized" by bankruptcies, are undoubtedly the first to harken to the message of the S. P. But there are also evidences of its penetration into working class ranks through trade unions, through gaining labor votes at election times and otherwise. It is quite understandable that among American workers, now developing radical thoughts nourished by the unemployment crisis and consequent disillusionment with Republicans and Democrats, there should be many whose first steps are directed towards support for the Socialist Party.

In the United States the Socialist Party has as yet no governmental responsibilities. It can therefore still afford to appear as an "opposition" party and keep a gentle rhythm in accordance with the throbbing vibrations of the class struggle. With the cunning adroitness, which for a long time "distinguished" the more experienced European social democrats their American counterpart has, since the beginning of the present crisis given much more front page publicity to demands for social insurance in general and unemployment insurance in particular. It is now inaugurating a sort of a national campaign for the six hour day slogan. Naturally this is designed to catch the mass sentiment and gain influence among such workers just casting off from their old moorings of capitalist ideology. Having had little experience in a proletarian movement such workers do not immediately distinguish the objective role of the Socialist Party nor the fact that its leadership has not the slightest intention of ever fighting for these demands. They do not as yet notice that the methods of the S. P. are not at all those of class struggle but merely of giving lip service to social reforms in order to gain the mass influence necessary to play its ordained role.

Growth of the S. P. is noticeable today in three main directions: First in increased votes obtained at local elections

last year as demonstrated particularly in the New York municipal elections. Undoubtedly a goodly section of the vote gain was furnished by the working class. Secondly, it is noticeable in extended influence and control in certain trade unions, mainly through the re-establishment of the Right wing leadership in the needle trades unions at the expense of the formerly powerful Left wing under Communist Party leadership. In these unions, where the workers are generally further politically advanced, the role of "socialist" union officials has also developed to a "higher" stage. Hence the more outspoken autocratic control; more outright, unconcealed co-operation with the bosses and their government in the anti-Communist offensive as well as in the severer suppression of the rank and file workers. More recently, through the C. P. L. A., the Socialist Party is making inroads into other union fields, for example, in the miners union of the Howat-Walker-Germer-Fishwick combination.

Seemingly there is a paradox in the fact that in such unions, when compared to the needle trades, the Socialist Party elements appear in a more "progressive" position. However, it is a very natural phenomenon completely in harmony with its flagrantly opportunist policy of winning mass influence and control and accordingly change its methods and phraseology whenever found advantageous. In these unions of more distinct A. F. of L. type a "progressive" front makes more rapid advance possible. Secondly the Socialist leaders do not as yet consider Communist sentiment there of sufficient strength to warrant a violent attack. Such, however, will be the course as soon as sufficient mass influence has been gained, or in the event of rapid growth of revolutionary sentiment among the workers. The whole record of the "socialist" needle trades union officialdom testifies to this.

The Socialist Party now claims a gain of 6,000 new members since September last, the founding of two new weekly papers on the Pacific Coast strengthening of its general press, greater leaflet distribution, revival of branch units in several sections of the country and more preparations made for publicity, for participation in the Fall congressional elections, etc. In the unemployment situation not only does it put forward "demands" for social insurance and the shorter workday but in New York and a couple of other points attempts have been made to create broad unemployment conferences. These conferences had, of course, no actual contact with the unemployed masses and were "safely" controlled for the S. P. bureaucrats, nevertheless they gathered quite a substantial representation from the trade unions and other working class organizations.

Communists and Unemployment

Only the Communists have actually dramatized the unemployment issue and begun to set masses into motion through the March 6th demonstration and subsequently. That alone is a distinct service to the working class cause and has increased Communist influence. But there are now serious dangers that this motion, despite the in-

tensity and pressure of the crisis, may be diverted into social reformist channels by the Socialist Party acquiring an ever more solid organizational basis—once more at the expense of the Communist movement. Particularly does that danger become apparent when the official Communist Party advances slogans, which at this time are entirely abstract and devoid of any revolutionary content, such as the slogan of the "political general strike". The same is true of its refusal to broaden the actual organization of the unemployment movement beyond what can be gathered in under the tutelage of the "revolutionary unions", the T. U. U. L. and the Party itself.

That the Socialist Party will not even seriously struggle for its own reform demands has been amply demonstrated by experience here and elsewhere. In the European countries as the Social Democracy grew in mass influence and bourgeois respectability and in several places became the government, its upper hierarchy became the tools of capitalism to curtail the social reform legislation already gained, to use the state machinery of suppression to carry it through and to crush its revolutionary opposition. The social democratic governments pursued exactly the same imperialist policies as their capitalist predecessors in office.

One notable case in point just now is the MacDonald government of Great Britain and its attitude to the rebellion in India. MacDonald has decided to carry on more openly the imperialist policies and crush the Indian rebellion. He does it conscious of the fact that it will seriously stimulate the rebellion going on within the labor party against the reactionary leaders, a rebellion now already growing in momentum. This is inevitable. It is in the very nature of things flowing from and becoming the expression of further increased economic pressure upon the workers and growing inability of the social system of wage slavery to feed the masses of the workers.

Within the American Socialist Party can now be noticed some faint ripples, expressed in New York in proposals for a more "progressive" trade union policy and for opposition to the black reactionary policy of the Daily Forward. Even the S. P. is not immune from the economic pressure upon the workers. But the present stupid attitude of the Stalinized Communist Party blankly characterizing it "social fascism" strangles all possibilities of taking advantage of such developments and plays directly into the hands of the Right wing reformists. There could of course, be no reason whatever to place any reliance upon the leaders of the "oppositions" within Social Democracy, unless they were ready to break with that ideology and accept the revolutionary position. In England at this moment, for example, the "Left opposition" leaders take that position fearing that the rapid swing to the Right, to the full employment of the imperialist forces by the MacDonald government will too seriously compromise the cause of reformism. Hence they sound the alarm to save it.

In the United States, in a less developed stage, "Left opposition" leaders who appear

within the S. P. fear that it is not basing itself sufficiently upon winning specific working class influence to strengthen the cause of reformism and thus more effectively preventing the masses from marching to a revolutionary position. It is evident that such elements are weather cocks of the pressure upon the workers but it is otherwise with the workers themselves who are subject to the pressure. Those workers who have taken the first step away from their capitalist ideology and are going toward the S. P., as well as those who are class conscious but temporarily disappointed by set backs experienced, are precisely the ones the Communist Party must win for the revolutionary struggle. Whenever "Left" oppositions develop within the Social Democracy the ground becomes more favorable for that task.

But above all the Communists instead of lumping together all organizations and groups, based on social reformism, leaders and rank and file members, to be combated as social fascists, must make clear the role of the Socialist Party. That is, to show that in a period of beginning radicalization of the workers, the S. P. or sections of it will take on a more radical appearance and make a pretense of fighting for the needs of the workers illustrated now by its "demands" for the six hour day and for social (unemployment) insurance. When the radical wave rises to higher stages and the workers move forward, actually pressing for their needs, the S. P. will become even more of an open brake upon the movement. When the workers go over to revolutionary action for their needs the S. P. will finally reveal itself in the open as a most ardent defender of capitalism, using all the means of force of the capitalist state to suppress the workers' action. This is the history of Social Democracy and there can be no other role for a Party not based upon the proletarian revolution.

For Correct Policy Towards Socialists

The ebb and flow of the movement are part of the natural laws of motion which Marxists will not fail to understand. However, to continue shutting their eyes to this and the failure to apply correct policies in this respect by the Stalinized Communist Party, can in a large measure be responsible for any additional lease of life given to social reformism and for the strengthening of the role of the S. P. as an instrument to attempt to suppress the proletarian revolution.

It becomes quite evident that precisely today, in the unemployment crisis in the United States, the most effective method of concretely and practically demonstrating to the working masses exactly what the position of the S. P. is, would be for the Communist Party to make all efforts to win socialist workers for a united front on unemployment demands. Moreover, a broad united front with all workers, including those of the socialist ideology is an imperative necessity.

The S. P. leadership would not accept this, which would only aid in clarifying reformist workers. With the struggle going forward, their exposure could be facilitated and the influence of social reformism limited accordingly. However, it is hardly reasonable to expect that the present Communist Party leadership would be able to pursue such a policy, which would have real revolutionary content. At least not until the "third period" gymnastics have been eliminated.

It is perhaps well once more to emphasize what comrade Trotsky has already pointed out: that conditions of development in the U. S. are now such that the class struggle may become sharply intensified to a quick tempo, with turbulent upheavals. What will it bring to the workers? Victory, in the sense of marking a step forward to a stronger position from which more effectively to continue the struggle, or defeat, in the sense of giving the movement an actual setback? This in a large measure depends upon the ability of the Communist Party to prevent the extension of the influence of social reformism upon the workers and to assemble them, instead under the Communist banner.

A National Tour for the Communist League

The end of this month will see the first meeting in the national tour now being organized by the Communist League branches throughout the country to hear report by Max Shachtman on the Communist movement in Europe, the International Conference of the Left Opposition that was held in Paris a month ago, and his visit to Leon Trotsky in Turkey. Comrade Shachtman has just come back from an extended stay in Europe and the comrades from all parts of the country have already written in asking for dates on which mass meetings can be arranged in their localities. This is the first national tour organized by the Communist League, and it offers a

good opportunity for the strengthening of the Opposition

New Haven, Fri. May 30. Philadelphia, Saturday, May 31. Boston, Sun.-Mon. June 1-2. Montreal, Tues. June 3, Toronto, Wed.-Thurs. June 4-5. Hamilton, Fri. June 6. Detroit, Sat.-Sun. June 7-8. Chicago, Mon.-Tues.-Wed.-Thurs. June 9, 10, 11, 12. Minneapolis-St. Paul-Superior, Fri.-Sat. Sun. Mon.-Tues. June 13, 14, 15, 16, 17. Kansas City, Thurs.-Fri.-Sat. June 19, 20, 21. St. Louis, Sun.-Mon. June 22-23. Springfield, Tues. June 24. Cleveland, Wed.-Thurs. June 25-26. Pittsburgh, Fri.-Sat. June 27-28

For further information on the tour write to 25 Third Avenue, New York, N.Y.