

The Right Wing Liquidators and the S. P. «Militants»

(Concluded from Last Issue)

The "Militant" group in the Socialist party, led by Stanley, Coleman, Porter and Bright, is not the first of its kind to appear in that organization. Since the conclusion of the war, three distinctly Left wing groups have arisen in the S. P. Each succeeding one was progressively weaker than its predecessor—weaker in numbers and weaker in principle. The first Left wing produced the Communist party (or rather, parties) of America. It stood for the Communist International, for the dictatorship of the proletariat, for the Soviet system—for the revolutionary principles of Marxism not only in Russia but also in the United States. Its shortcomings and weaknesses are not the subject of the present article: it is enough to say that they were of a fundamentally different character from those that marked the subsequent Left wings in the S. P.

The second Left wing (Engdahl, Olgin, Kruse, Salutsky, Trachtenberg) was a pitiful caricature of the first: it was timid, cowardly, more afraid of joining the Communist International than it was of living under the same roof with the reactionary high-priests of the S. P. Nevertheless, driven by the still existing revolutionary sentiment in the party, it issued public pronouncements of a far different nature than those of the Stanley group. It did not attempt, as do Stanley and his fellow exporters of radicalism at low prices, to defend the Mensheviks, S. R.'s and their "democratic rights" under the proletarian dictatorship. It demanded that the S. P. affiliate (even though with reservations) to the Communist International, an idea as remote from the minds of Stanley and Co. as the planet Neptune is from Mercury. It made public a summary denunciation of the Second International, as well as of the tendencies towards a two-and-a-half International—a radicalism towards which the "Militant" leaders do not even lay claim. In a word, it was so far in advance, from a revolutionary standpoint, of the present "Militant" group that a comparison in any sense favorable to the latter is entirely out of the question.

LOVESTONE AND THE STANLEY GROUP

Now let us interrupt ourselves before reading how the Communists in those days evaluated the Engdahl-Trachtenberg-Olgin-Kruse group, so that we may first see how Lovestone and Gitlow estimate the Left reformist wing in the S. P. today: "The resolution introduced by the Stanley group was thoroughly pro-Soviet not merely in revolutionary class content." (Herberg, Rev. Age, No. 7, emphasis in original). "It is a resolution which, basing itself on the proletarian character of the Soviet state, very closely approximates a Communist position." (Rev. Age, No. 6, our emphasis). "The differences between the 'Militants' and the Oneals, Hillquits, Lees and Thomases are differences of principle of such a character that they cannot be reconciled within the realms of one party." (Gitlow, Rev. Age, No. 9, emphasis in original).

The "Militants'" position on the Russian revolution—certainly an unerring touchstone for a revolutionist—is thus not only pro-Soviet in its "revolutionary class content" but is very close to the Communist position—at least according to Lovestone. Surely, very little could be added to so flattering a recommendation for a group which not only does not deserve it but ungratefully refuses to accept it.

Let us compare these letters of credit to the manner in which the Communist International evaluated the Engdahl group in 1920—the Comintern of Lenin's days in which Lovestone so fervidly avows faith. In an open letter to the American Socialist Party after the latter's national convention in May 1920, when the Engdahl minority resolution on affiliation with the "Third" was accepted by the membership, the Communist International wrote:

"The convention was dominated by Centrist and reactionary elements—by the yellow 'reformist politicians' Hillquit, Lee, Stedman, Oneal Block, Panben; by the 'one hundred percent Americans', Meyer London, Solomon; by the 'State Socialist' and inverted social patriot, Victor Berger; by Cannon [Joseph D. and not James P.] and Soltis, Karlin and Berlin—all of whom have no place in a party affiliated to the Communist International. There was a 'Left wing'—Engdahl, Kruse, Tucker, Holland, etc.—which demanded affiliation to the Communist International and a revolutionary restatement of Party principles; but this group was a pitiful minority, its ideas were confused, permeated by cowardly compromise and petty bourgeois prejudices. In all the convention not one Communist voice was heard."

By MAX SHACHTMAN

This is what the Communists said to the vacillating Left Centrists of the Engdahl type, to people who were even then infinitely closer to Communism than nine-tenths of the leaders of the Stanley group, in all probability, ever will be.

But the Stanley group is nevertheless "pro-Soviet", argue the liquidators of the Right wing. Yes, but essentially in the same way that Oswald Garrison Villard or any other advanced liberal is "pro-Soviet". The inexpensive observations in the Stanley resolution on the Five Year Plan being "consistent with socialist philosophy", do not change this fact. The "difference" between Stanley and Hillquit on what the former calls "the extermination of minority [i. e., Menshevik] opinion" is largely the difference between a diplomatic six of one and a brazen half dozen of another.

It is precisely on this point that the cloven hoof of the reformist becomes obvious to anybody but a Lovestone or Herberg—who do not want to look: what irks Stanley is the suppression of "democratic rights" in Russia, that is the suppression of bourgeois democracy. We Marxists are divided by an insurmountable wall from the reformists in the working class, by a class distinction: we stand for proletarian democracy, the others stand for democracy "in general", that is, for bourgeois democracy. Whether it is Mr. Lee who frankly "condemns the denial of elementary civil rights" in the Soviet Union, or Mr. Stanley who more plaintively "looks forward to the removal of two obstacles . . . the cessation of the extermination of minority [what minority?] opinion", does not weigh very much either way with us. The Left Opposition is fighting for the rights of the revolutionary proletarian core of the Party and the Soviet Union, but it is bored to death by the interminable repetition of the old Menshevik chorus of praise for the "democratic rights" of the Russian bourgeoisie.

"FRONTIER GUARDS FOR THE SOVIET UNION

But, the Revolutionary Age persists in its fervid defense of this newly-found potential ally, the "Militant group" is for the socialist accomplishments of the Soviet Union, and unlike Hillquit, is ready to defend Russia from intervention so that socialism may be built in one country. Only the latter-day apostles of the Right wing can conceive of this as "very closely approximating a Communist position". This song too is an old one, and it does not wear well on the ear. In 1920, Hillquit's S. P., as much and even more under the pressure of the workers as the Stanley group of leaders, adopted a resolution which said: "'Moscow' is doing something which is really challenging world imperialism. 'Moscow' is threatened by the combined capitalist forces of the world simply because it is proletarian. Under these circumstances, whatever we may have to say to Moscow afterwards, it is the duty of Socialists to stand by it now." etc. etc.

Stalin at that time was not yet the "best disciple of Lenin", and there had not yet been evolved the theory that Russia could build a socialist society alone provided that military intervention is warded off. The Comintern therefore replied to Messrs. Hillquit, Oneal, Engdahl and Olgin, in the letter mentioned above: "This resolution evidently is based on a misconception of the rôle of the Communist International. The Communist International is in no sense a defensive organization. It is an organ of aggression, the general staff of the world revolution." That Stanley has now approached closer to the Stalinist theory of national socialism, and the conception of the international working class movement as frontier guards for the Soviet Union, does not thereby signify that he was approached closer to Communism.

But the workers, the workers, the workers in the ranks! cry the Right wing politicians. It is hard to refrain from laughing to see all the big and little Lovestones, who yesterday could not see the workers at all because their eyes were hypnotically fixed upon the leaders, Chiang Kai-Shek and Purcell and Raditch and LaFollette—display such maternal anxiety about the workers in the ranks. But their new position is hardly an improvement upon the old.

There are workers in the ranks of the "Militant" group, and undoubtedly good ones, workers who are striving to adopt a militant policy of class struggle, who are fed up with the disgraceful course of Hillquit and Oneal. That is precisely why the Communists must not adopt the simple-minded policy of the Stalinist theorists, who lump leaders and masses into a single "social-fascist" pot, but must approach the

workers who are sincerely willing to fight the capitalist class in such a way as to win them for Communism—which means to win them from their present leadership of Leonard Bright, McAllister Coleman and Louis Stanley. For us, this is the A B C of revolutionary politics. And just because these spurious "Left" leaders, these saviors of reformism, are compelled to garb themselves in second hand radical left-overs in order to accomplish their reformist aims with greater facility—just because of that the Communists must patiently and intelligently make their real rôle clear to the workers who follow them.

Shouting at them will not succeed in detaching their followers for the Communist movement. What is needed instead is such a policy as presses Messrs. Stanley and Co. to the wall on every concrete issue of the working class struggle and enables the workers under them to see in their own experiences to what extent the radical phrases of their leaders match their deeds. What is needed, in a word, is the policy of the united front, which was and remains a revolutionary weapon for the mobilization of broad masses of workers in struggles against their class enemy on the basis of concrete issues, struggles in which they will clearly perceive whether it is the Communists or the reformists who represent the today and the tomorrow of the proletariat.

We would not waste two inches of space on the "Militant" group were it not for the fact that it is at one and the same time the channel through which working class discontent with reformism is being confusedly expressed and the channel through which its leaders seek to divert it harmlessly. Precisely because of the workers in it, it is incumbent upon the Communists to tear the rags and tatters of cheap radicalism off the leaders of the group and reveal them as reformists. To do anything but that is tantamount to keeping the workers fettered in the chains of reformism, only one of whose links is in the hands of the Stanleys, for the whole chain is pulled by Hillquit and Lee. And this is just what the Lovestone faction is doing, despite all its declamations about the "workers in the ranks."

THE MECHANICS OF LIQUIDATIONISM

In not a single one of its "analyses" of the "Militant" group have the Lovestone leaders made any distinction between the ranks and their spokesmen. But worse than that has been the outrageously exaggerated idealization of the "Militants" and their policy. Lovestone and Co. are looking for recruits and allies. They cannot find any substantial prospects in the Communist party. Since the Right wing is the bridge to the social democracy, the Lovestoneites look to the S. P. for succor. On the way from Communism to reformism they first encounter the Left reformists of the Muste school on the "trade union" field and the Stanley school on the "political" field.

But the mechanics of this voyage back to the socialist camp are such that Lovestone is compelled to sail there under the Communist flag. The color in the banner has faded considerably in recent times, but the working class crew of the Right wing ship, which is not yet aware of the port charted by its captains, still insists upon flying the flag of Communism. Miller and Benjamin and others did not understand these mechanics, or else they were too impatient to reach the comfort of port; these renegades from Communism changed ships in mid-sea and are sailing home to where they always belonged under the reformist flag of Muste, comforted by the thought that they will meet again their more cautious shipmates of yesterday.

But Lovestone, who wants to arrive on his own ship, continues to sail under a false flag, or rather, one to which he is false. And like other captains before him, he must constantly assure the crew that the promised land is not only in the offing but that it is filled with fabulous wealth, like the riches of the Indies which Columbus fascinated his men. The social democracy is Lovestone's logical objective after departing from Communism. The miserably poor ideological baggage of the Stanleys and Brights and Mustes is a poor inducement for such a voyage, and the Right wing leaders are simply drawing upon their imagination to ascribe to the former a revolutionary richness which they do not and cannot possess.

Up to now, Gitlow and Herberg have been hardest at work in shaping up the "Militants" as attractively as possible. What else is the meaning of the alleged "revolu-

tionary class content" of Stanley's resolution, of its "close approximation" of the Communist position and of other non-existing virtues which they have attributed to this reformist group? What does it mean when the Revolutionary Age gently chides the "Militants" for not demanding the organization of socialist fractions in the trade unions? What is the meaning of Gitlow's indignation at Norman Thomas because he "advocates the liquidation of the Socialist party into a petty bourgeois third party" (as for ourselves, we are quite willing for Norman Thomas to liquidate the Socialist party, but not for Stanley to rehabilitate it)? It means that Gitlow is idealizing the "Left" wing reformists, that the charm with which he invests them is spun entirely out of the thin web of his imagination.

The gifted sculptor of Greek mythology, Pygmalion, spent arduous years in carving out a marble incarnation of his impassioned imagination. It was so beautiful when the artist rested, that he fell in love with the image. So ardent was his love and so intense his desire for the marble to come to life that, with the aid of the gods, we presume, the cold stone was transformed into the living flesh and blood of Galatea, with whom he thereupon lived very happily. In any case, that is the story. But Gitlow is no Pygmalion. Neither his ardor nor his artistic skill in molding Stanley in the image of his desires, neither his imagination nor yet the gods, will succeed in converting the stony figure of Left reformism into a revolutionary Galatea.

No, that is hardly the transformation which the new edition of the saviors of reformism will undergo. They will change and develop, but not in this manner. They have a significant rôle to play yet in the working-class movement of the country, for they are a product of a new situation which will not disappear over night. But that question deserves special consideration.

N. Y. OPEN FORUM

March 7: COMMUNISTS AND PROGRESSIVES

By James P. Cannon

March 14: THE PARIS COMMUNE: 60 YEARS AFTER

By Max Shachtman

March 21: (No Lecture: Entertainment)

March 28: THE SLOGAN OF THE SIX-HOUR DAY

By Arne Swabeck

at the

LABOR TEMPLE

14th Street and Second Avenue

Open at 8 P. M.

Admission: 25c

Auspices: New York branch, Communist League of America (Opposition).

Chicago Open Forum

MARCH 1: "Trotsky-Stalin and the Theory of Socialism in one Country"

By HUGO OEHLER

MARCH 8: "Trotsky, the Left Opposition and the Five Year Plan"

By J. MAKELIE

MARCH 15: "Unemployment, the Six Hour Day and the Communist Party"

JOHN EDWARDS

MARCH 22: "The Three Currents of the Communist Movement and Revolutionary Perspective"

By HUGO OEHLER

EVERY SUNDAY 2:30 P. M. at

30 N. Wells St., Chicago

N. Y. DRESSMAKERS' STRIKE

Pressure of space and other unavoidable difficulties have compelled us to omit from this issue a report on the situation with regard to the dressmakers' strike called in New York by the Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union. In the next issue, however, we shall print a thorough report on the latest developments and an evaluation of the whole course of the strike. The question of the future of the Left wing union will also be discussed in the Militant.