

# Before the Detroit Convention Of the Socialist Party

The impending collapse of the German Social Democratic Party, shortly before Hitler's appointment to the Chancellorship of the German Republic, was the background to the first decision to hold a world congress in January 1933, of the Labor and Socialist International. The actual surrender and resultant breakdown of the largest and most influential Party in the L. S. I. did not hasten this gathering but rather led to its postponement.

Its sessions did not convene until August 1933, and not because there was a real desire by the leadership of the 2nd International to hold such a world gathering to take inventory of the condition in which this movement found itself. The powerful reformist British Labor Party and the Swedish Social Democratic Party even opposed the original decision for the January Congress. In reality not a single member of the International Bureau wanted the conference. If it was held it "was due to the fact that no one member of the Bureau was willing to move its further postponement". In a word, the pressure in the ranks of a good number of the leading parties in the International forced the holding of the congress. That explains the unwillingness of any member of the International Bureau to take responsibility for its postponement.

The congress became the forum for the expression of the diversified views current in the movement. The horrible defeats of the working class acted as the instrument in raising serious doubts in the minds of wide strata of social democratic workers as to the efficacy of social democratic theory and action. The leadership sensed at once that the congress could not meet without this question rising to the forefront. It was clear that here was involved no ordinary situation. The defeat of the German workingclass was one more great test of the international program of social democracy, applied to the concrete revolutionary situation in that country. The facts were that the German Party suffered an inglorious defeat, and committed a disgraceful betrayal of the working class.

**Leading Role of German Party**  
It was a discussion upon these questions the International Bureau feared. It knew that the congress, willy-nilly, had to occupy itself not alone with the German Party and its leadership, but with the entire International. The German Social Democratic Party bore the same relation to the L.S.I. as does the Russian Communist Party in the Stalinist International. It dominated the 2nd International. That is why a discussion on Germany, and the role of the Social Democratic Party in the crucial situation meant unavoidably a discussion on the whole international course of social democracy. Yet the Bureau could not avoid the congress for fear of a world wide inner revolt which would disrupt its ranks. The congress then became the means of stemming the obvious leftward trend of large sections of social democratic workers.

In order to understand the congress it is necessary to turn briefly to the executive session of the Bureau. In his pamphlet "The Struggle for Revolutionary Socialism", Heinrich Erlich, one of the leaders of the Polish Bund, describes vividly the character of this meeting. He says: "When the session of the Executive Committee was called, there was not a member on the Executive who had the least desire to discuss the past, particularly the German past."

Naturally! An effort was made to discuss only the future without reference to the past. That effort was in no sense realized. The discussion, at the Executive Committee and at the conference centered about Germany. All ideas, plans, criticisms and defenses developed out of that discussion. But in general, little discussion took place. The only criticism made of the course pursued by the German Social Democracy came from the Polish Bund which attempted to draw some lessons from the catastrophic events. According to Erlich, in the Executive Session, Otto Wels, the leader of the German S.D.P., spoke with an aim of eliciting sympathy for his party and for himself. "There wasn't a trace of his former self-assurance. He was ready to admit that the toleration policy was a mistake. . . ." In the conference, records show that the greatest number of participants in discussions, were the critics of the line of the L. S. I.

**Wels Defends Policy in Germany**  
In the Congress Wels changed his attitude entirely. He spoke sharply and vigorously as of old. He admitted nothing and defended everything. We refer to Erlich's description of his speech at the congress:

"This speech was unlike the one he delivered at the Executive. There, he spoke as a broken down man, (!) as one conscious of his

## 2. The Paris Conference Of the 2nd International

guilt, although without courage to admit it, as one who tries to explain away instead of defending his actions. At the executive session, Wels realized that he was addressing members of the International only.

"In his speech at the conference, however, he was surer of himself. He took the offensive. He thought it necessary at this conference to 'cast aside the accusations' that the German Social Democracy was not nationalistic enough, that it had not shown sufficient interest in the German nation. In short, speaking as he did, Wels had his German audience in mind rather than the audience of the conference.

"It was a harrowing speech. Incidentally my gaze fell on the French delegate Marquet (representing the extreme right wing of the French Party, now split from it and forming the Neo-Socialist party in France—A.G.S. With his characteristic smile, he listened to Wels. Marquet himself hasn't too great a belief in internationalism. What a joy it must have been to him to listen to the nationalistic utterances of Wels!"

Graphic enough! The great majority of delegates at the Congress represented the same point of view as Wels presented to them. In a word, International Social Democracy reiterated its policy of reformism, coalition governments, the theory of the "lesser evil", extreme nationalism, and a whole series of downright reactionary policies that were given expression by other delegates.

The report of Wels on the German situation more or less marked off the sides in the conference. Out of the report there naturally arose a discussion on the policies pursued there, and breaking beyond the confines of Germany, took up the whole course of the International. There were three points on the Congress agenda: (1) The struggle against war; (2) The struggle against war; and (3) The unity of the working class. Around each one of these a conflict broke out between those demanding adherence to the old policies, a continuation of the past and a small group demanding a break with the policies of the past. The lineup appeared as follows: The extreme right wing making up the majority of the Congress and led by the German delegation, the British Labor Party, the Scandinavian delegates and part of the French delegation. A center group led by Adler and Bauer, which always succumbed to the pressure from the right wing. And finally the left wing of the Congress led by the Polish Bund and supported by delegates of the French Party, the Italian Party, and paradoxically enough, the majority of the American delegation.

**Polish Bund Leads Fight**  
The victories of Fascism forced the Congress to consider, under the discussion of the first point on the agenda, the validity of the policy of reform. The Polish Bund led the fight against the old point of view and presented the new position that is becoming current with the numerous left groupings in the Socialist movement.

That view calls for an end of the policy of reform and states that the only possible means for a victory against capitalism lies through the destruction of the capitalist state and the establishment of "the dictatorship of the revolutionary party (!) during the period of Socialist construction" This position, however, was by no means the dominant one. Reformism is all powerful in the 2nd International. Listen to the speech of the Danish Delegate, Andersen, who declared at the conference that: "It would be very unfortunate if the workers as a result of our discussions, would gather the impression that recent events compel us to seek new ways (!) and new methods (!) for carrying on our struggle. I should like to warn against the statements made here to the effect that the German events mean the end and bankruptcy of reformism. It is one of those slogans that result in dangerous illusions and leads to dangerous generalizations."

Vogt, the delegate from Sweden, voiced similar sentiments: "If the International wants to succeed it must openly and unequivocally state, regardless of all theories destined for the far distant future, that we defend democracy, the freedom of nations. We do not want a proletarian dictatorship. We want to preserve the democratic institutions. . . . Let us discuss the conquest of power, but let us talk less about how to go about making revolutions. When the International will appeal to the League of Nations for peace and freedom, for the struggle against war, for the defense of democracy, its purpose will be clear."

ly understood, and its power will be manifest."

The conference discussed all three points on the agenda as one. There were no limits to the subjects argued at one time, and the discussion drifted in such a manner. The majority resolution of the conference did not, as the minority claims, fail to give definite statements on their position. The resolution reiterated the position of reformism. It did so on all questions. There was one slight change. The resolution declared that in those countries where fascism was in power it would be necessary to employ "revolutionary means" to bring about its overthrow. But by no means should the working class employ revolutionary means in the "democratic" countries!

### Right Wing Dominates Congress

So much did the Right Wing dominate the Congress that even the weak-kneed efforts of Bauer to state simple truths failed of their purpose. Thus the following clause was stricken from the original draft of the resolution: "The German democracy of the future will either be Socialist or not come into existence. In the Fascist countries the goal of the revolutionary struggles must not be the return to bourgeois democracy but the conquest of Socialist Democracy" Criticisms of the League of Nations were stricken out. Affirmation of disarmament conferences as a means of preventing war was included. The Right wing insisted upon the deletion of the following: "The International will oppose by all its means any aggression against the Soviet Union. It denounces once more the banditry of Japanese imperialism against the Chinese revolution and the menace which Japan is creating on the Eastern frontier of Russia. It denounces the pitiable failure of the policies of the League of Nations in the presence of these dangers."

The "Marxist" Bauer, who then sharply criticized the German Social Democracy, only to prepare the same fate for the Austrian proletariat, withdrew everytime the Right Wing made its demand. The majority resolution in its accepted form, continued to endorse social democratic policy as we have known it to be: rejection of the revolutionary struggle for power, the proletarian dictatorship, the Soviet system, and reiterated its reformist policy. Just as Stalinism has not learned a single lesson from the events of the past years, the Labor and Socialist International similarly prepares continuation of a course that has brought disaster to the international working class. By its assertion of the class collaborationist policy, pursued now for more than a decade, and the promise to continue a nationalist course, there is not the slightest hope in this organization.

### Resolution of Polish Bund

Contrasted to this was the resolution presented by the Polish Bund and supported in all by 18 of 300 delegates. This resolution represented the left current at the Congress. As pointed out previously, it was inevitable that any serious conflict on fundamental questions within the Socialist movement had to revolve around the question of the state and the struggle for power. This is the point of departure of the Bund resolution.

It says for example: "The German events condemn at one and the same time the failure of the Communist policy of division. (It should read Stalinist—A.G.) and the reformist policy of Socialism". Further: "The Conference declares that it is not the task of the Socialist parties to attempt to straighten out the capitalist world or even to collaborate in such attempts. It declares on the contrary that by whatever means (!) they are going to achieve power they must not secure the exercise of power within the structure of the capitalist regime but must utilize power in order to destroy the bourgeois state and install the dictatorship of the revolutionary party (not the proletariat—A.G.) during the period of Socialist construction."

Again: "It is evident that the working class will defend energetically its democratic achievements against all reactionary attempts but the struggle against Fascism cannot have as its goal the maintenance or re-establishment of bourgeois democracy which is based on economic inequality but that of constructing a real Socialist democracy. . . . It is necessary that the working class begins to prepare at once for a struggle by all the means (!) which may secure victory". Asserting the need to struggle against the crisis, to work out plans to win the middle class, expressing lack of confidence in the League of Nations, the Disarmament Conference, the Economic Conference, and concluding that only the working class alone can struggle against Fascism, War and the crisis, the resolution ends. The resolution was signed by two Bund, two French, two Italian, one Estonian, one Belgian and four Amer-

ican delegates. Six additional votes were registered for it in the Congress. Thus almost the entire Congress of 300 delegates supported the reactionary right wing.

### Left Wing Confuses Issues

It is clear that in August 1933, the lines of difference in the L.S.I. were first beginning as a result of the German events. They were destined to grow sharper and clearer. But then, there was still a great deal of confusion. The Polish Bund always represented the 2 1/2 International tendency and it needed only the German situation to force it into the open once more and reaffirm a position it has had for some time. Even so, the "left wing" resolution reiterated by confusion, and by a failure to draw correct lessons from their analysis. The bulk of the congress and that includes the largest and most influential parties in the L.S.I. asserts the policy that has been pursued by Social Democracy for many years, the policy that led to heavy sacrifices and defeats of the world proletariat.

Since the time the congress was held new events have served to increase the discussion in the Social Democratic movement on the fundamental policies followed by it. The growth of Fascism reached a new height in its victory over Social Democracy in Austria. The armed struggle of the Austrian workers, who fought in defense, at a time when it was too late, has provoked new doubts in the minds of many social democratic workers. The decisions of the Congress in August 1933, when social democracy, following the defeat in Germany, reaffirmed the defense of bourgeois democracy, and declined to adopt a policy of revolutionary struggle for power with the aim of destroying the capitalist state and substituting for it the proletarian, received another blow in Austria. The continued rise of Fascism in every European country forces to a head the disputes over fundamental questions revolving around the fate of society and the working class. Thousands of social democratic workers are receiving new and practical instructions in the character of the state, democracy and the struggle for power. They are learning, and rapidly, too, that reformism has tied their hands and made them easy victims of capitalist oppression. The leftward movements in the 2nd International are therefore to be sought in the events of the last year and a half.

### Left Tendencies Grow

Since August, the left tendencies have grown throughout the L.S.I. The Polish Socialist Party accepted a resolution at its congress endorsing "a proletarian dictatorship of workers and peasants". Left tendencies and groupings exist in almost every party in the International. The Spanish youth organization has declared itself for the Fourth International. The youth organizations of Poland, Belgium, France and the United States also move rapidly to the left on a number of very important questions. In Paris, the Right wing dominated completely. Undoubtedly if a congress were held now, there would be a different relation of forces.

The Polish Bund, we said above, did not really move toward the left. It reaffirmed, in reality a position it has had for some time. While it demands a break with reformism, it does not lead to clarity. It is confused on the questions of the struggle for power and the proletarian state. It deliberately confuses Stalinism with Bolshevism, as do all neo-Marxists. That is why it speaks against both, Communism (!) and Social Reformism. And in its place? It demands "revolutionary Socialism", "Marxian Socialism", But Revolutionary Socialism, Marxian Socialism, is the quintessence of Bolshevism. The fundamentals of Marxism are contained in the decisions of the early congresses of the Communist International.

It is not as if we are beginning anew. The revolutionary movement has already passed through the war years. It has already experienced the betrayal of social democracy when it came to the support of imperialist capitalism with the outbreak of the war, up to the present day. And the "left wing" today has not expressed a single new thought. It has expressed only half truths and confusion. One does not need to investigate (!) the different ways and means to take power. Revolutionary means (!) in Fascist countries and the old ways in democratic countries can only prepare more defeats for the working class. You must say very openly and clearly that the road to power lies through the armed assault of the working class upon the whole structure of capitalism, to transform the social order. It means the destruction of the capitalist state and the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship, which serves as the transitional power of the working class, in the erection of the classless society. This is fundamental. There is no other way!

And so it is with a whole series of questions: the Soviet system, the struggle in the trade unions, against the crisis, against war, the liberation of the colonial peoples, etc. We do not demand that the left

# A Critical Analysis of the American Workers Party

Editor's Note—The following is the first of a series of articles contributed to the discussion of the movement for a new party by Felix Morrow.

To all who look upon the building of a new revolutionary party and International as the primary task today, the evolution of the American Workers Party is of serious import. For here is a group, of undoubted seriousness of purpose, almost all of whom have come from the Conference for Progressive Labor Action with some training in mass work, and who have come out as a revolutionary organization. No one could seriously have expected, of course, that such a group, with no experience in party life and thought, and so new to the revolutionary road, should overnight develop revolutionary clarity; Bolsheviki are certainly not made at such short notice. Serious gaps in the political equipment of the A.W.P. were to be expected. The important question is whether, after a period of amorphous evolution, the American Workers Party will take to the road for a new party and international.

Three closely related tendencies stand between the A.W.P. and the new road. I shall summarize these tendencies, including the form they take in the Program of the A.W.P., and then suggest the latest light thrown on them, by the A.W.P. public lecture-conferences in New York on April 14, 15, 21, 22.

### The Past of the A.W.P.

The A.W.P. is proud of its "origin in action" in the Conference for Progressive Labor Action. While there is much that is useful in this past, it is also a reformist past. The sharpest theoretical clarity is necessary to distinguish between the useful heritage and its reformist nature. A break with this reformist past is necessary. In view of the A.W.P.'s proud boasts about its origins, and its insufficiently critical analysis of its past reformism (see Chapter IV of the Program), one is constrained to say that the A.W.P. stands more in danger of reformist hangovers than it is of losing any useful elements of its past. A glance at its history will make this clear enough.

Beginning, in 1929, as an organization of trade-union progressives, the Conference for Progressive Labor Action won a certain amount of success, due to the fact that the Communist Party had launched itself on its dual unionism, while the Socialist Party had long capitulated to the A. F. of L. leadership. Politically, the C.P.L.A. was reformist; in advocating independent political action for labor, it was little further advanced than the unions which in 1924 declared for La Follette. Even when it began evolving more militant trade union policies, building rank and file oppositions, and branched out into the unemployed movement, the C.P.L.A. remained definitely reformist in politics. Nor was there further clarity in the declaration of the September, 1932 convention which made the C.P.L.A. into a political organization, for the criticism of the Socialist and Communist parties was limited to their mass work, and in no way was linked up with political fundamentals. Its declaration that it aimed "to abolish, not to reform, the capitalist system", was only repeated the other day by the right-wing Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota. For the C.P.L.A., the concrete meaning of the phrase appeared to be, not evolution toward a revolutionary workers party, but a reformist Farmer-Labor party.

wing groupings in the 2nd International at once accept a full communist program. We do point out, however, that when the Polish Bund declares at the Paris Congress that the working class must seek new ways and break with "Communism and reformism", that it lends to confusion and not clarity.

### Perspectives of the Fight

As the struggle develops, naturally, a greater clarity will be achieved. For the moment however, the struggle is still in its early stages. The numerous groups that exist all over the world, will begin to find their centers. There will be a great deal of back-sliding, no doubt. But the genuine left wing movement will also find its center and its path.

Such is the background to the present situation in the Socialist International and in the American party. The pressure of events is driving great sections of the socialist workers to the left. The moods of these workers drives many leaders to the left—some genuinely, the majority, as experience has shown, only to head off a real break with the past and to decapitate the movement.

Out of the Paris conference, the groupings and tendencies have be-

## 1. The Political Evolution Of the C.P.L.A.

The year after the 1932 convention the leaders of the C.P.L.A. were in the Farmer-Labor Federation. Presumably that was their idea, then, of the way to "abolish" capitalism.

### December Conference

Then came the Roosevelt program of "planned" capitalism, with its repercussions in the labor movement. It deflated the right wing in the Socialist Party—for Roosevelt's was their program. The militants, Muste's former allies, now began to come to the fore, talking like so many "Mustelites" about militancy in the labor unions and unemployed work, reaching the workers, etc. As their strength grew, the militants did not fail to point out that if militancy was desired, the way to get it was to win the S. P., as they were doing, not to set up one's own sect. The necessity of distinguishing themselves from the Socialists in more significant terms than militancy became apparent in the C.P.L.A. Nor could leftward-moving centrists close their eyes any longer to the essentially reformist character of farmer-laborism. In December, 1933 the C.P.L.A. convention decided to build take in the Program of the A.W.P., and then suggest the latest light thrown on them, by the A.W.P. public lecture-conferences in New York on April 14, 15, 21, 22.

At no time—including the 1933 convention resolutions—had the C.P.L.A. made the decisive distinctions between reform and revolution. Throughout this period the case against the Socialist and Communist parties had never been put in political terms; always the quarrel on the level of day-to-day work. Not until the Program of the A.W.P., published early in 1934 (written with the assistance of revolutionary intellectuals with no C.P.L.A. background) does there begin the first criticisms of the Socialist Party in terms of its reformism, and even here the talk is mainly of its mass work (see Chapters III and IV). It is true, as Sidney Hook says, that the theory of the state is the touchstone of a party's nature; it is true that the Program (plus further statements by A.W.P. leaders) approaches the Marxist theory of the state (though it contains opinion omissions and ambiguities—role of Soviets before taking power, armed insurrection, the ambiguous formula of workers' democracy substituted for the Marxist formula, dictatorship of the proletariat).

### Further Analysis Needed

There must be a period of thorough theoretical discussion and analysis, in order to see whether the rest of the Program, and particularly what the A.W.P. brings over from the C.P.L.A., is actually in consonance with Marxism. The mere presence of the class theory of the state does not guarantee the rest, certainly not when the introduction of the theory of the state is of so recent origin. No revolutionary but is gratified that the A.W.P. leaders were a year ago preparing to build a Farmer-Labor Federation now are speaking in revolutionary terms; but such a volte-face reveals a gross empiricism which must be overcome by theoretical discussion and training. Clear formulation of fundamental principles is a necessity at this point. By all means let us be "flexible" in the application of our principles. But let us first have principles to be flexible about.

In the light of what has been said, one of the most disturbing aspects of the A.W.P. conferences

come more active and seek one common level on the basis of a clarification of the issues involved. True revolutionaries will seek to help these left groupings and tendencies to find the proper road. The Bolshevik-Leninists will endeavor to help in the education of the workers. It will be necessary to demonstrate to them, that upon the basis of the struggles they are engaged in, only one possible outcome exists. Either a complete break with reformism, and the 2nd International or else capitulation to it. On the basis of such a break, it will be impossible for these workers to go to Stalinism, which deserves the same fate as reformism. These forces now in the Socialist International must participate in the movement to reorganize the ranks of the international proletariat. In other words it must participate in the construction of the Fourth International.

The general background of the groupings in the American Socialist Party lies in the International Congress. On the basis of an understanding of the situation in the International, which grew out of world-shaping events, we shall be able to understand the situation in the American Party.

ALBERT GLOTZER.

were the many examples of contempt for theory or minimizing of the role of theory. There is no subtler way of blurring the distinction between reform and revolution than by shying away from fundamental theoretical discussion. In reformist parties, centrists express their discontent by talking action; the militants in the S. P. exemplify this mood. In revolutionary parties or parties gravitating to a revolutionary position, centrists pool-pool "too much theoretical discussion", or by emphasis on events or mass action denigrate the role of theory and party. At the conferences, the most ambitious, and the most revealing example of this was J. B. S. Hardman's discussion of the Russian Revolution.

### The Role of the Party

Hardman built up a picture of the Bolshevik party playing no decisive role in the revolution: "Only the minority (of the Central Committee) carried out the insurrection; the majority was against it." "For a quarter of a century the Russian workingclass did things rather than discuss. Fortunately nearly all its leaders had nothing to do with the revolution. Most of them were emigrants, and at the crucial moment the leaders were in Finland". He held out as most significant the gap between Russian feudal government and its growing capitalist industry, contrasting it with the close nexus between industry and government in America. Thus, said Hardman, our problem in America is very different than the Russian. (He could say this, of course, only by ignoring the gap in America between industry and government on the one hand and the productive forces on the other.) So, said Hardman, the Russian Revolution gives "at best only certain lessons" (unspecified). By making what were actually strategy and purpose action carried through by the Bolshevik party, into blind history, Hardman is able to dismiss as peculiar and local events which were actually the resultants of fundamental principles of revolutionary strategy. That Hardman did not boldly enunciate which fundamental principles he dismisses—this is also typical of centrist ambiguity; Hardman is simply reserving in advance "the right" to differ, whenever a fundamental issue becomes crucial. A keen observer once put Hardman's case aptly. "He's trying to make a philosophy out of commonplaces: don't be dogmatic, be realistic, let's be sensible, etc." Everything is there, in fact, except a theoretical foundation.

### "Too Much Better"

The conferences supplied other illuminating examples. Answering the charge that the A.W.P. was in danger of all the pitfalls of the gross empiricism characteristic of the whole history of the American labor movement, V. F. Calverton said: "The Socialist Labor Party shows what too much theory can lead to. Its theory is so perfect, it can't move". It was a good joke and got the laughs—but revealed a true Philistine's attitude toward theory, as if to say, "A little of it is all right in its place. But—". Walter Edwin Peck evidenced the centrist's fearful hate for theory: "Radicals have been analyzing the world as they saw it, but they had metaphysics on their mind. We have been trying to sell the workers Hegel and Saint Karl. What was the power of the I.W.W.? Because it didn't sell workers any philosophy". Then, most innocently, Peck went on to say that the I.W.W. "was killed by prosperity". He could scarcely be expected to understand that this meant they had no adequate philosophy!

George Schuyler even embarrassed his own comrades with the assertion: "Marx hasn't got anything to do with the U. S. We don't have to borrow any European philosophy".

Not every spokesman of the A.W.P. so denigrates theory, of course; but so do they do in the face of this tendency which has to be fought as uncompromisingly as outright reformism? So far as I could see, all they do is grin embarrassedly when their comrades make asses of themselves.

—FELIX MORROW.

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