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Beginnings of a Right Wing Formulation of Principles

OUR chief quarrel with the Ring Wingers has been that they have refused to state their position. For years the American Socialist Party has been a formless movement, ranging from Syndicalists to Single Taxers, and expressing itself by programs which were designed to express the "common denominator" of the membership, in such a way as to offend nobody, and attract everybody—from small property owners to migratory workers.

Alone of all Socialist movements of the world, this movement of ours has been able successfully to crush all attempts at definite formulation of principles and tactics, and the creation of clearly-outlined currents of Party opinion.

When called upon to define their position toward new theories of working class organization and action, our "leaders" have remained silent, surrounding themselves with an inky vapor through which they give vent to oracular generalities calculated to deceive the rank and file. If the membership displays sympathy with these new ideas, our "leaders" hasten to profess an eagerness for the same ideas, being careful, however, to remove the vital organs of the animal; or if they cannot do that, and must take an uncompromising position such as was laid down in the St. Louis Resolution, carefully refraining from acting on it.

Publicly they proclaim their sympathy with the Russian Bolsheviks and the German Spartacists, at the same time flirting with the Berne Conference, and strenuously opposing the Left Wing movement in our own Party, whose aim is identical with that of the European Communists.

Publicly they join in the denunciation of "social reformism," and endorse the abolition of immediate demands in Party platforms; but at the same time they participate in a Non-Partisan League, help to organize a Labor Party, and join in the call for a national Amnesty Convention in which bourgeois liberal groups will be represented.

The Right Wing has refused to state its position. This has forced the Left Wing to state it, at the same time stating our own in no uncertain terms. The Party membership, educated by the War and the Revolution in Europe, can no longer be put off by "reorganizations" and the primitive thuggery which up to now has been the Right Wing's only answer to our challenge. The Right Wing is beginning to find it necessary to formulate its own principles, and this it is now doing, interspersed with petty personal attacks upon Left Wingers, in *The Socialist*.

In the second number of *The Socialist*, for example, there is an article endorsing the Communist International, summoned to meet in Moscow, but—after all, perhaps the Second International is not so bad as it is painted. After all, we do not know anything about it, except from reports in the capitalist press! In the same number Louis Waldman outlines his conception of municipal, state and national ownership of industry, under democratic control, as Socialism! In *The Socialist* of May 13th we find a defense of "democracy," which is answered on this page; also an editorial upon "Co-operatives," in which occurs the following sentence:

"With proletarian organization and proletarian control, the cooperative is a far more effective weapon for accomplishing the revolution than is a reliance upon a vague and ill-defined mass-action."

In almost every paragraph of *The Socialist* are similar statements, the cumulative effect of which is

to outline the Right Wing position—a position which more and more clearly defines a group in substantial agreement with the "parliamentary" Socialist groups which dominated the Berne Conference.

We welcome this emergence of a clear-cut "savage Socialism" in our midst. It simplifies our task.

"Illegal"

ONE of the Right Wing's most impressive arguments against the Left Wing is that the adoption of our Manifesto and Program will make the American Socialist Party an "illegal" organization. In the last number of *The Socialist*, for example, there is an article by Claessens, pointing out that in Buffalo, where the Party Local has joined the Left Wing, the Manifesto and Program are being used in the courts to outlaw Party members.

Is it possible that the Right Wing is taking this opportunity to display its *real sentiments* concerning the St. Louis Resolution—which, it will be remembered, also made the Party "illegal"? Is it possible that the Right Wing, in the face of such grave events as the imprisonment of "Gene" Debs, proposes that the Socialist Party repudiate his position, because it makes the Party "illegal"—as, in view of the Supreme Court decision, it undoubtedly does?

We do not wish to put in the mouths of these people words which they do not say. But in the end, to what does this panic cry of "illegality" reduce itself?

Is the Socialist Party merely a vote-getting machine, competing with the Republicans and the Democrats for control of the political State? Or is it a movement of the working class to overthrow the capitalist system?

Do the Right Wingers repudiate Marx's definition, that the modern capitalist State is "nothing less than a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and that not less so in a democratic republic than under a monarchy"?

If the State is merely the political expression of the capitalist system, and the Socialist Party proposes to destroy capitalism, how can Socialism be "legal"—except insofar as its working-class strength, backed up by action on the industrial field forces recognition of its political representatives?

The Socialist Party is "legal" only so long as it suits the capitalist State to permit its legality. At the present time the American capitalists have determined to outlaw all attacks upon the State. The carrying of the red flag is "illegal" in this State; Victor Berger's party is "illegal" in Wisconsin; the New York *Call* is "illegal" in the eyes of the Post Office, several times each week; and on May Day peaceable protest meetings were practically outlawed by the authorities, who deliberately permitted gangs of thugs to break them up—an act which was upheld by the Secretary of the Treasury in Washington, in an official communication.

The new session of Congress will pass a law declaring "illegal" all propaganda or actions "inciting to the overthrow of the Government." As we understand the terms of this law, it can be interpreted to include any and all attempts to point out the essential class character of the capitalist State—an institution which, according to Marx himself, cannot be used by a proletarian majority to introduce Socialism.

Are we to have a Socialist Party which frankly abandons, or postpones, its revolutionary objective—an opportunistic movement, anxious above all to conform to the "legality" which a capitalist government ordains? Or shall we lay down a set of revolutionary principles which must not be lost sight of, and to which all our actions must conform, no matter how seriously our tactics must be modified by circumstances?

In being "legal," we must remember that the Socialist movement will be entirely at the mercy of the capitalist government; in holding fast to Socialist principles, we pin our faith to the growing class-consciousness of the working class, which will create its own "legality," and enforce it by its own proletarian power.

Democracy

WE are pleased to find that at last *The Socialist* has risen to the dignity of an editorial page.

While we recognize that we must give *The Socialist* time, we did expect something better than the whines about "Discrimination" and "Hatred;" we sought to find it in the official pronouncement on "Democracy."

"Democracy," says *The Socialist*, "the rule of the majority, with full and free opportunity for the minority to express its opinions and to agitate for its ends, still remains the best method of conducting human affairs."

This like all the other cant about democracy, sounds well on paper, but as our friends use the phrase "still remains," they are apparently of the

opinion that this "method of conducting human affairs" is, or has been in operation somewhere. We would be glad to find where this elysium is or has been. In reference to national governments no such idealistic plan has even been tried, much less become the recognized method of administration. In political parties and societies where there is no responsibility for actual governmental administration, this method, so far as we are aware, has never been practised.

But let us put the theory to the test of practise. Is democracy the method of procedure within the Socialist Party? Is it the way in which those for whom *The Socialist* speaks, conduct the affairs of Local New York? Is it in the name of the "full and free opportunity for the minority to express its opinions and to agitate for its ends" that the Executive Committee has ordered the "reorganization" of the Branches which do not bow to its will? Was it under the influence of such high sounding ideals that the editor of *The Socialist* fathered the heresy-hunting resolution at the State Committee?

The Socialist's belief in democracy, like *The Call's* belief in the freedom of expression, is so much hypocritical cant. Both these publications are afraid of their own real beliefs, they are afraid openly to embrace the tactics they are logically driven to employ. Let us be under no misconception about these things. THE COMMUNIST is not in love with dictatorship or with any form of tyranny, any more than the workers and peasants of Russia are in love with the suppression of counter-revolution, but we recognize that democracy and freedom are mere shams under the existing form of society, and that during the transition period from Capitalism to the establishment of the Cooperative Commonwealth, all opposition to the will of the class-conscious workers must be stamped out or rendered innocuous.

We see from actual experience that political democracy will not and can not work. We recognize that under the cover of these lofty phrases Capitalism establishes the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. We hold that the half-truths of this idealistic language are so many traps and pitfalls for the working class, and we ruthlessly strip these phrases from our own movement. In society today the class struggle is raging, in some parts of the earth it has burst into open flame and the contest of ideas is being fought through the mouths of machine guns, through the power of the bayonet, through the ravages and the bloody horrors of war, in other parts it is comparatively quiescent, appearing in the form of strikes, lockouts, unemployment demonstrations. . . . To this struggle there can be only one end—the victory of the workers and the establishment of Socialism. When Socialist society is firmly established, when the opposition is once and for all defeated, then we can experiment with ideal democracy and the beautiful conceptions of society that many of us cherish. But until then we must struggle unhampered by any illusions as to what is the real nature of present day society, or any attempt to put into practice the pleasant theories evolved in the quite studies of bourgeois idealists.

It is the duty of Socialists to point out to their worker brothers and sisters the brutal realities of capitalist society, and the necessity of the struggle against it. The beauties of Jeffersonian democracy have nothing whatever to do with the affairs of today. Governments are not wilfully less idealistic today than 140 years ago. They are facing different conditions and they act in accordance with the conditions that confront them. The ideals of American democracy were evolved upon the prostrate bodies of the negro race.

In the present crisis in the American Socialist Party let us also face the facts. We of the Left Wing are dissatisfied with the administration of the Party, local, state and national. We have protested in vain and we are now determined upon a showdown. We are out to capture the Party, to weld it to suit our purpose—the historic purpose of Socialism—and to rid it of the disease that has crept into its vitals. For this purpose we have stated our position as to what are the duties and purposes of the Socialist Party, and on this position we are appealing to our comrades throughout the Party. All over the country the men and women of the movement are lining up solidly behind that position.

Democracy is not the essential question at stake. We are not appealing to the membership about the lack of democracy manifest in the administration of the Party. That we consider a minor question and in due time we will indict our officialdom before the bar of Party opinion. The issue is clear cut and no amount of sneers at our personal courage, integrity or ability, nor covert hints to the American Government as regards the desirability of our arrest and incarceration, will deter us from stating that issue—whether the American Socialist Party is to be the party of revolutionary Socialism or whether it is to be the party of bourgeois liberalism, petty reforms and idealistic phraseology.

That is the issue on which we appeal to the membership over the heads of the Party bureaucracy. That is the issue upon which the Left Wing organization is based.