

Left Wing or I. W. W.—The Way to Unity

By Harold Lord Varney
(See Editorial, Page Three)

ONE cannot but regret the growing coolness between our revolutionists of the Left Wing and our revolutionists of the I. W. W. The bonds of sympathy seem straining. The hope for unity seems doomed. Aloofness is giving way to rivalry, and a situation which, a few brief weeks ago, seemed freighted with the possibility of a new and solidified alignment of all revolutionary forces, now threatens to repeat the old-time blunder and perpetuate the old time weakness of division.

How often it has happened in the labor movement of America that, not principles, but men have kept us apart. How manifold have been the struggling little groups which only lived to glut the vanity of their egoistic chiefs. They crowd the museum of our memories. The tragedy of labor has not been written by its adversaries. It has been self-created, and every defeat has been self-inflicted by labor's fatal division. For generations, one ineffable need has clangored in our ears. It has been unity which we lacked.

Not that the labor movement has not realized the problem. Picas for unity have been prolific. Programs have been haunted by the over-mastering desire to unite. Conferences have been summoned and delegates have gathered and departed—but always in vain. Unity has been a sentiment, but never a program. The divisions have been too stark.

And so the labor history of America has run its turbid course. Secessions have followed secessions, and with every crisis, new and puny groups have sprouted into autonomy. S. L. P. and S. T. & L. A.: Social Democracy and Socialist Party: I. W. W. and W. I. I. U.: Syndicalist League and One Big Union: Red Socialist and Yellow Reformist: Left Winger and Bolshevik. These are but the notable names in a long, forgotten scroll of schism.

But for this division, there has hitherto been a certain justification. Apart from personalities, the labor movement has been muddled in its ideology. On one issue at least, there has been a traditional cleavage of thought. On one side were the Parliamentarians: on the other were the Industrialists.

The Parliamentarians were obsessed with a political, geographical concept of the new society. They visioned a perpetuation of the existing state. Their propaganda was non-proletarian: their pleas were made to the workers as consumers—rather than to the workers as producers. They reduced the revolution to the absurd simplicity of the casting of a vote. Through long, sterile years, they exhausted their momentum in hectic and hopeless political attempts. In this group, belonged all the political Socialists and many of the present Left Wingers.

The Industrialists, on the contrary, were anti-Statists. They sought an industrial democracy—not a political millenium. The future society, to the Industrialist, was a world organized on the scaffold of a super-industrial union. Representation would follow the industry, not the map. A generation ago, the minds of the Industrialists had already emancipated themselves from the fetish of politics. They had already envisaged the distinction between the parliamentary and the industrial forms of Socialism. The industrial point of view found its reflection in a succession of left wing secessions: the S. L. P.—the I. W. W.—the Red split of 1912.

Until 1917, this breach was insuperable. It was a theoretical contrast and Parliamentarians and Industrialists clung stoutly to their formulas, justifying their belief by arguments which blinked the future. Theoretically, both sides proved their case. The future is an intellectual bank account which can never be overdrawn. But the dispute ended in theory. No stunning, smashing argument of fact had intervened, to give the verdict of finality.

And so, during this pre-1917 period, the divisions in the American labor movement were taut and rigid. On the Parliamentary Right, stood the Socialist Party, overshadowing all minor groups and seemingly impervious to change. And on the Left, the Industrialists, after many racking controversies, had gradually crystallized themselves into the I. W. W. Of course, the lines were not absolute. A fringe of Parliamentarians could be found in the I. W. W. and a similar fringe of Industrialists in the Socialist Party. And a negligible portion of the more impossibilist type lurked on the outside in the S. L. P. and the W. I. I. U. But, generally speaking, the Socialist Party and the I. W. W. were the miniatures of the state of intellectual contrast in this period.

Then came Bolshevism. With immortal letters of blood and iron, it wrote the answer to the problem. With the ruthlessness of destiny, it closed the doors of an epoch. Socialism was no longer hypothetical. It came. And when it came, it was not Parliamentary. Victorious Bolshevism scrapped the State and proclaimed itself Industrialist. The controversy was no

longer debatable. Russia gave to the American Industrialists the unanswerable argument of fact.

Like a tidal wave, the beliefs of the Socialist Party began to reverse themselves. Haltingly at first—then, tumultuously, as the passing months gave permanence to the Bolshevik regime, the political Socialists abandoned Parliamentarism. Bolshevism became a band wagon and they scrambled aboard. Like all new converts to ideas which time has made hoary, they became vociferous in their protestations.

Possibly, the I. W. W., of all the world's movements, was shaken least by Bolshevism. The I. W. W. welcomed the Bolshevik triumph with the joy of the expected. The final link in I. W. W. theory had been forged at last. But there was nought in the new happenings to compel a revision of belief. The I. W. W. had always been anti-parliamentary. The I. W. W. had always sought Industrialism. The I. W. W. had preached 'Bolshevism' while the Bolsheviks themselves were still groping. And the Wabby felt like one who had long since swum to an island of ideologic truth, as he watched the Russian swimmers coming into port. The naive exuberance with which the new left Wing American Socialists began to propagate Industrialism, was naturally amusing to those who had fought the Industrialist battle for nearly a generation. Bolshevik—the new Left Wingers styled themselves, but well the I. W. W. knew that Bolshevism was but the Russian name for I. W. W. and that, after a few flights of Left Wingism, the Socialists would learn that every road of industrial revolution leads inevitably to the Industrial Workers of the World.

"How wonderfully eloquent are facts," says Trotsky. "How utterly powerless are words." And yet, the vagueness of their program suggests that the Left Wingers of America still stand at the turnstile of words.

Now, in this formative period, while the Left Wing

The Collapse of the Old World

By Gregory Weinstein

EVEN before the Russian revolution it had become clear to every observant revolutionary Socialist that the world would enter upon a road of great social changes, and that the war, regardless of who would be the "victor," would result in revolutions in all countries. The large masses—affirmed those Socialists—will not be able, after the war, to return to their old forms of economic, political and social life. Thrown out of their conventional places, worn out by the prolonged slaughter, these masses could not but harbor in the innermost recesses of their heart a deep hatred for the order of things which forced them to die on the battlefields and starve in the rear. Tempered in the fire of battle and learning how to use arms, the masses, sooner or later, would conclude that they have sufficient means to end this order of things: it would be necessary only to turn the weapons in their hands against the adherents and defenders of the old social order which turned them into slaves and fratricides.

The march of the Russian Revolution has completely vindicated the opinions of the revolutionary Socialists. Neither the magic of the bourgeois high priests nor the hunger and suffering which have fallen to their lot through invasion by international Capitalism, could interfere with the process of the Russian people taking power into their own hands, and with it destroy the ruthless and unjust society of oppression and violence, erecting on its ruins a society of Socialist fraternity and Communist labor.

Revolutionary events in Germany are developing the same tendency. The Spartacans follow the Bolshevik policy. In Hungary and Bavaria the proletarian revolution is triumphant. All power there is in the hands of the Communists—Bolsheviks, who are working in concert with the Russian Bolsheviks. Workers in other parts of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire are ready to join the revolutionary Hungarian and Bavarian proletariat. Even Czechoslovakia, which has been the main hope of the Allies, is seething with unrest.

The Allies have their hands full. And in their own countries revolutionary unrest is brewing. Italy and France are on a volcano. And even America, having suffered less than the rest from the war, is not calm. The strike wave is not decreasing, but rises higher and higher.

The old world is in the grip of a red revolutionary movement, which is growing larger and larger from day to day. And it is not able to disengage itself from the fiery grip.

groups are shaping themselves into permanence, it is vital that they strike the keynote of the hour. The only insurance that the present Left Wing movement does not go the ephemeral way of its forerunners, will be the economic soundness of its program. Will it voice the urge of the masses? Will it hew to the ruthless line of economic facts?

My criticism is that the Left Wingers have already stumbled at this identical point. Their program is splendid in its internationalism, but it has missed the essential note that could bind it to the American proletariat. It is obsessed with Russia and it blinds itself to the truth that Russia and America are economic entities, abysmally dissimilar. It ignores the surge of the American proletariat toward unionism, rather than mass action. It savors of ideology: it overlooks the concrete problems of the shop. It speaks a European language and American labor does not understand.

That movement will win in America which reflects American economic conditions. Such a movement cannot be jettied out to us from Russia. It must be a growth—an emanation from the instinctive yearnings of American industrial toilers. Emissaries and acolytes from Bolshevism need not create it. It is here—full grown and conscious. Its roots are already deeply planted in the American soil. It is the Industrial Workers of the World which has caught the genius of the American Proletarian revolution.

We have learned nothing as economists if we have not learned that nations are industrial organisms—each with a different economic skeleton. One nation is agrarian; another maritime; a third, industrial. America is both industrial and agrarian.

Men's thoughts are moulded by their means of making a livelihood. Quite naturally then, the American and British proletariat reason otherwise than the Russian. There is a contrast of thought and instinct which reflects the immense contrast of Russian and Anglo-Saxon economic institutions. In Russia, the psychology of the situation indicated mass political action as the means of proletarian expression. In America and Britain, mass political action is unprecedented: mass unionism is the traditional proletarian weapon. It is mass unionism which the Left Winger must himself align with if he wishes to put teeth into his theories.

The programs of the Left Wing groups have straddled this issue. And in so doing, they doomed the future of their cause.

With a deliberate evasiveness, they have endorsed 'revolutionary industrial unionism'. But this is meaningless. The Socialist Party in its political platforms has done this before them. But what union? Why suppress the name?

Is it the American Federation of Labor which the Left Winger should join, to gain 'revolutionary industrial unionism'? Is it the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, which has so cravenly begged to be admitted to the A. F. of L.? Is it the W. I. I. U. with its pitiful handful of old men?

Capitalism, it would seem, has answered the question. There is only one union which Capitalism has penalized. There is only one union which has made an aggressive, uncompromising assault upon Capitalism, and into that union revolutionary labor is surging. In seeking for an ally, why look further—Left Winger—than the unconquerable columns of the I. W. W.?

If it is revolutionary industrial unionism which you seek, then you are spared the task of forming it. Frank Little and Joe Hill and the murdered ones of Everett and the crushed rebels of Leavenworth have paid the price and formed it for you. If it is Bolshevism that you yearn for, listen to the cries of the capitalist class who shout that the only form of Bolshevism which is to be feared in America is the I. W. W. If it is revolutionary numbers that you seek, the I. W. W. will come to you with an intact army, four fold larger than your own. And if courage, fortitude and stamina mean anything to you, who dream of mastering America, it is yours and at hand when you ally the Left Wingers with the Wabblers.

And so, the Left Wingers stand today at the crossroad of decision. They must commit themselves upon the I. W. W. issue. Events move too rapidly—issues are too taut to be silent. The crying shame of Leavenworth calls for redress and the I. W. W. must inevitably act—with the Left Wingers, if possible—without them, if necessary. Either there will be unity, or the programs of the Left Wing groups will cement a new division. The splendid hope of the present—the hope of a super-labor movement which shall unite the revolution—stands or falls with this issue of the I. W. W. Shall we be Bolsheviks in Russia and evasions in America? Let our Left Wing program speak. On one hand is the A. F. of L.: on the other the I. W. W. They are fighting the final struggle. The Left Winger must choose between them.