

The Left Wing and the Revolution

By Louis C. Fraina

From "The New York Communist"

THE distinguishing feature of the controversy in the Socialist Party between the Right Wing and the Left Wing, between the moderates and the revolutionists, is that the Right Wing refuses to develop and defend its *real* program. This is partly fear, partly camouflage, and partly sheer stupidity.

The moderates have a program, and a consistent program. It consists of parliamentarism, of reforming Capitalism out of existence, of municipalization and nationalization of industry on the basis of the bourgeois parliamentary state, of the theory that the coming of Socialism is the concern of all the classes,—in short, the policy of the moderates (which is in itself consistent, while inconsistent with fundamental Socialism) is a policy of *petit bourgeois*, "liberal" State Capitalism. But this policy broke down miserably under the test of the great crisis of Imperialism; it broke down under the test of the proletarian revolution, and revealed itself as fundamentally counter-revolutionary. But the moderates, essentially, still cling to this reactionary policy, although they are compelled by circumstances to disguise it, to camouflage it with cheap talk about "being left wing" and "a shift to the left" in the international movement, compelled to wait until "normal" times in order openly to defend their reactionary policy. So the moderates refuse to discuss the fundamentals of the Left Wing Manifesto and Program; they refuse to oppose their real policy to our's; they dare not. . . .

Accordingly, the Right Wing indulges either in vituperation of our revolutionary comrades, in threats of expulsion (guardians of the unity of the Party!), or in sophistry.

Characteristic of this sophistry was Algernon Lee's letter in the *Call* of April 2nd. Lee implies that the acceptance of the Left Wing policy depends upon an actual revolutionary crisis, and says:

Have we reason to expect a revolutionary crisis in this country in the proximate future, aside from the possibility of such a crisis being voluntarily precipitated by one element or another? In such a crisis, if it should be precipitated (no matter by whom) would the majority of the people probably be actively with us or against us? Or would the majority remain neutral and inert, ready to accept the outcome of the combat between a revolutionary minority and a reactionary minority? In this latter case, taking into account only the supposed active minority, which of them would probably win in a decisive struggle at this time? On the basis of our answers to these questions, have we reason to seek or welcome a hastening of the crisis?

These are fundamental questions. Upon the answers we give to them must rest our decision on detailed problems of methods and tactics. They are unescapable questions.

It is important to understand the immediate "moment" in the great social struggle as a basis for action; but Lee uses it to make arguments against action.

The policy of the Left Wing, in general, which is the policy of revolutionary Socialism, is not a policy only for an actual revolutionary crisis. The tactics of the class struggle, of the unrelenting antagonism on all issues between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, function in "normal" as well as in "revolutionary" times.

It didn't require an actual revolutionary crisis to oppose the imperialistic war.

It didn't require a revolutionary crisis to make Lee's acceptance of the war "in order to save the Russian Revolution" a betrayal of Socialism.

It didn't require a revolutionary crisis to make Lee's voting for Liberty Bonds, a betrayal of Socialist practice.

It didn't require a revolutionary crisis to make Lee's voting for a "Liberty Arch," on which is inscribed "Murmansk" as a glory of the American troops, a betrayal of the international revolution in general, and the Soviet Republic in particular.

It doesn't require a revolutionary crisis to condemn the policy of petty-bourgeois reformism and compromise pursued by Algernon Lee and his confreres in the Board of Aldermen.

And it doesn't require an actual or immediate revolutionary crisis to accept the Manifesto and Program of the Left Wing; but this acceptance is necessary for the immediate struggle of the moment, and as a preparation of our forces for the revolutionary struggle that is coming. . . .

Let us discuss this problem more fully. It is necessary to completely expose the miserable arguments of the Right.

The Central concepts of Left Wing theory and practice are mass action and proletarian dictatorship. From these concepts flow three sets of tactics: before, during and after the Revolution. The immediate "moment" in the social struggle may compel a different emphasis; but the tactics are a unity, adaptable to the particular requirements of the social struggle.

Mass action implies the end of the exclusive concentration on parliamentary tactics. It implies awakening the industrial proletariat to action, the bringing of mass proletarian pressure upon the capitalist state to accomplish our purposes. It means shifting the centre of our activity from the parliaments to the shops and the streets, making our parliamentary activity simply a phase of mass action, until the actual revolution compels us completely to abandon parliamentarism. Mass action has its phases. It isn't necessary to have an actual revolution in order to use mass action,—before the final form of mass action we may use its preliminary forms, in which however, the final form is potential. Take, for example, our class war prisoners. It is necessary to compel their liberation. The Right Wing depends upon appeals to the Government which has imprisoned our comrades, upon liberal public opinion, upon co-operation with bourgeois and essentially reactionary organizations in "Amnesty" conventions,—upon everything except the aggressive mass effort of the proletariat. The Left Wing proposes a mass political strike to compel the liberation of our imprisoned comrades, to bring proletarian pressure upon the Government. Get the workers to down tools in the shops, march to other shops to pull out the workers there, get out in the streets in mass demonstration,—that is mass action we can use now, whether or not we are in an actual revolutionary crisis.

In proletarian dictatorship is implied the necessity of overthrowing the political parliamentary state, and after the conquest of power organizing a new proletarian state of the organized producers, of the federated Soviets. These concepts were implied (if not fully expressed) in revolutionary industrial unionism, which equally contained in itself the implication of mass action. Revolutionary industrial unionism placed parliamentarism in its proper perspective. The acceptance of and the propaganda for revolutionary industrial unionism did not require an actual revolutionary crisis; yet the moderates refused to accept this vital American contribution to revolutionary theory

and practice (even refused to accept industrial unionism as necessary in the immediate economic struggle).

"No! It is miserable sophistry to affirm that the Left Wing policy accords only with an actual revolution. That is precisely what the moderates in Europe said. When the war broke, the moderates (led by Scheidemann, Cunow, Plekhanov and Kautsky), declared that the Basel Manifesto had proven wrong in expecting an immediate revolution, that the masses had abandoned Socialism, therefore—they had to support an imperialistic war! But the Basel Manifesto did not assume an immediate revolution; it asserted that war would bring an economic and social crisis, and that Socialism should use this crisis to hasten the coming of revolutionary action.

The moderates in Germany said it was absurd to expect a revolution; and then they used all their power to prevent a revolution. And when the proletarian revolution loosed itself in action, the moderates acted consistently and ferociously against the revolutionary proletariat.

In Russia, the moderates said a proletarian revolution was impossible; but when it came, they acted against the revolution.

That is the attitude of the moderate Socialists everywhere, who are riveted with chains of iron to the bourgeois parliamentary state, who are absorbed in futile petty bourgeois reformism and the "gradual penetration of Socialism into Capitalism." Their arguments may appear plausible, until the test of the proletarian revolution reveals them as sophistry. Lee's arguments and policy are characteristic of the Scheidemanns, the Hendersons and the Vanderveldes. . . .

Imperialism, roughly, appeared in 1900; and with its appearance developed the revolt against parliamentary Socialism,—Syndicalism, Industrial Unionism, Mass Action, Bolshevism, the Left Wing. Imperialism, as the final stage of Capitalism, objectively introduced the Social-Revolutionary epoch. But the dominant moderate Socialism did not adapt its practice to the new requirements; and it broke down miserably under the test of the war and of the proletarian revolution.

The war was the expression of the economic contradictions of Capitalism, of the insoluble problems of Imperialism. It is clear that Capitalism is breaking down; that the proletarian revolution is conquering. Capitalism cannot adjust itself to the new conditions, cannot solve its enormous economic problems. The world of Capitalism is in a revolutionary crisis,—more acute in Europe, less acute in the United States, but still a crisis. This crisis, which is a consequence of the economic collapse of Capitalism, provides the opportunity for Socialism to marshal the iron battalions of the proletariat for action and the conquest of power.

The final struggle against Capitalism is on; it may last months, or years, or tens of years, but this is a revolutionary epoch imposing revolutionary tactics. And revolutionary agitation is itself an act of revolution.

It is not our job to "hasten" a revolutionary crisis. Capitalism itself takes care of that. Our job is to prepare. Our job is to act on the immediate problems—unemployment, the soldiers, strikes, class war prisoners—in the spirit of revolutionary Socialism, in this way preparing the final action.

The Left Wing Program is a program of action, not a program of wishing for the moon. Sophistry can't annihilate it. Life itself is with us.

They Destroy the Left Wing!

By A. L. Sugarman

THE old guard within the Socialist Party is standing on its head, in desperation. All of its literary talent has been drafted into service in an attempt to save the Party for the old leaders and the old policies, and to stamp out the rapidly growing movement of the Left.

Now comes Ralph Korngold with a communication addressed to the Socialist press and officialdom, an effusion entitled "Revolutionary Romanticism." Ralph's effort is indeed a gem.

We quote: "The great Russian novelist Turgenieff warned the revolutionists against what he called the worship of the dirty shirt." Korngold's reflection is of course upon the wage worker who doesn't dress as immaculately as himself, but as between a dirty shirt and a muddy brain, such as Korngold's, we much prefer the former. Then, Comrade Korngold refers to the fact that W. F. Dunn, a Butte syndicalist, who is rather vague on a number of questions, was a candidate for mayor on the Democratic Party ticket. This is to be deplored, but the fact that Dunn made a democratic campaign on the Democratic ticket is scarcely

as deplorable as the fact that many alleged Socialists make democratic campaigns on the Socialist ticket. And poor Ralph gives the impression that *The Liberator* is a left wing organ!

Those of the left, says the estimable Korngold further, use Billy Sunday methods. This is laughable. Recall, for a moment, the typical campaign speech. . . .

"Vote for ME! If I am not elected, the city will go to the dogs. There is only one road to salvation, that is my election. The Republicans are liars. The Democrats are thieves. Follow me! . . .

And so on, *ad nauseum*. Yet Korngold says we use the Billy Sunday methods!

"The slow plodding processes of education and organization they (the left wing) will have nothing of" charges our critic. Korngold was manager of the literature department of the national office for a time. The "educational" stuff that he got out is well known. Let us teach the workers the common sense of the milk question! "They don't tell us exactly how their rev-

olution is to be brought about," wails Ralph. He wants blue prints, I suppose, and a detailed program of each day's events.

The logic of the gentlemen of the right is indeed peculiar. Workers have rejected milder programs, they urge, and therefore 'tis folly to present more radical ones. The first is true. They have rejected mild programs, because they are mild programs. We have lost fights in the past; what reason to suppose we can win now?—is one of their questions. As if conditions are the same now as in past decades! The main difficulty with these Socialist standpatters is that they cannot keep pace with the times. Events are moving too rapidly for them. They cannot keep up. They are still living in the last century!

"It is characteristic of these literary faddists and extremists that they never finish anything they start," concludes the estimable Mr. Korngold. Well—there is one little job that we've started and that we intend to finish and that—soon. We're going to clean out the Socialist Party to begin with; the moderates will be forced to get out of the way. For the day of the Socialists in the Socialist Party has arrived!