

# Social Reforms and the Left Wing

By Jay Lovestone

WHAT is the attitude of revolutionary Socialism to social reforms? Can a Socialist party be revolutionary and at the same time accept a program of "immediate demands"? Does a revolutionary policy demand that we neglect the present condition of the proletariat? Does the Left Wing want all or nothing? The answer to these questions touches the heart of the social-reform controversy—the so-called "immediate demands" issue.

At the outset let us look into the why and wherefore of capitalist reforms. It must be kept in mind that when one speaks of reforms, he is well aware of the fact that the capitalist system is not yet overthrown, and that the "reforms" are to be granted by capitalists. Why do capitalists grant reforms?

There are two reasons. First, in order to stifle the ever-increasing class consciousness of the workers. To the capitalist class, as to others, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. By granting certain "improvements" in the immediate conditions of the workers, the capitalist hides the class nature of the present system of production. By apparently being kind to the worker, the capitalist hides the conflict of interests and promotes the proletariat's belief in the brotherhood of labor and capital. Thus the spirit of independent class action by the proletariat is dampened. Reflect for a moment over the effect of the "Welfare Bureaus," of profit-sharing, and other immediate "reforms" on the employees. The extensive social reform program of Germany played no small part in cementing the proletariat's loyalty to the kaiser. The heralded "constructive reforms" fought for by the Social-Democratic Party are to a great extent responsible for the bloodshed in Germany today. Moderate Socialism in Germany, as everywhere, ascribed to bureaucratic petty bourgeois reforms a creative revolutionary value. The effect of these reform campaigns has been to dupe the proletariat as to the class nature of the state and bourgeois democracy. The German proletariat was misinformed as to the nature of the Communist order. And today Germany is not a land of Soviets but a bloody bourgeois republic!

There is another reason for the capitalists' granting "improvements" in the workers' conditions. The only use the capitalist has for the proletariat, is exploitation. But to be capable of exploitation a laborer must exist. He must do more than that. He must live. A broken-down worker is inefficient.

On the whole, the bourgeoisie are not as stupid as some of our twentieth-century utopian Socialists believe. Their investigators have made extensive studies proving that efficiency can be increased by shorter hours, and "improvements" in working conditions. The improved methods of production and business organization intensify the degree of exploitation. Hence, Capitalism can well stand "reform"—or change of tactics in its exploitation of the working class.

"Shall we fight for or against these 'immediate improvements'?" asks the moderate "Socialist." From this we are led straight to the object of a revolutionary Socialist political party. What is the purpose of a class conscious proletarian party? Its object should be none other than to always hold before the working masses the ideal of revolution, the ideal of a new society—a Communist society. A Socialist party should broaden the activity of

the proletariat into class activity, and should always point out the nature of Capitalism. The Socialists should not wage campaigns for the transformation of the state or for the enlarging of its functions. A Socialist political party must always be on guard against the seduction of the proletariat by the state activities in its "benefit." The parliamentary campaign and the legislature offer us a means of expressing our class interests, and of exposing bourgeois class interests.

The policy of the Left Wing, or revolutionary Socialism, is neither to oppose or to propose these "immediate demands," these "social reforms"—this whole gamut of "beneficial state activities or state Capitalism." The social reform of state Capitalism is today a fact to which Socialism must adjust itself.

The Left Wing does not intend to abandon the immediate struggle. To the Left Wing the immediate demands that arise serve as the dynamo of all action. By means of them we generate revolutionary currents amongst the proletariat. By aggressively engaging in this struggle the revolutionary sparks latent in the proletariat can be fanned into revolutionary fires against the bourgeoisie. We employ this struggle as a means of promoting the final struggle.

An analysis of the immediate problems confronting the American working class will help us clarify this matter. Let us analyze the attitudes of revolutionary and petty bourgeois Socialism towards them. First, let us take the unemployment problem. The tide of unemployment is rising. Shall we say to the capitalist class "Get out" and presto—there will be no unemployment?

The Left Wing holds that unemployment—rather disemployment—is an inherent characteristic of Capitalism. As long as Capitalism exists there will be disemployment. The problem cannot be "solved" as long as Capitalism is intact. Unlike the petty bourgeois Right Wing Socialism, the Left Wing believes that not even the capitalist state, that miracle-organ, that God of Right Wing Socialism, can "solve" this problem. Therefore the Left Wing disdains petitioning the President, as the official organ of Right Wingism, *The Call*, has done. We will not petition even a fourteen-point capitalist champion for the establishment of Government Employment Bureaus. What more dangerous weapon against the proletariat could be given the bourgeois government than control of employment. What chance would a labor spokesman, a hounded "agitator," have of getting a job? Perhaps this accounts for J. P. Morgan's generosity in contributing thousands of dollars for the maintenance of these "public" employment bureaus! Again to "solve" this "problem" of Capitalism; reactionary, utopian Socialism agitates for unemployment insurance. Has insurance ever done away with unemployment anywhere? No! Not even in Germany where the "Socialists" now have a majority!

But cannot anything at all be done to combat the immediate distress of unemployment? Yes. The Left Wing has a plan of action in meeting this immediate demand. And in this struggle the Left Wing sees a means of promoting the final struggle. Suppose there are today two million unemployed in America. Shall we invest our energy in several tons of paper (petitions)? Shall we appeal for the votes of "all liberty loving citizens" and promise them a "solution" by insurance? No! The

Left Wing would show the why and wherefore of unemployment. The Left Wing would take advantage of this crisis of Capitalism and spread revolutionary propaganda amongst the unemployed. It would not stop there. The Left Wing would propose and work for a country-wide strike for shorter hours so that fewer workers might be disemployed.

Is this an abandonment of the immediate struggle? Why waste energy in attempting to solve the insoluble, the contradictions of Capitalism? Why misdirect the efforts of the working class when splendid opportunity is offered to lead them into revolutionary channels? Is this demanding all or nothing? Is such a policy as outlined above based on the notion of "damn the immediate benefits and the worse the better?"

Let us take another example; the release of political prisoners and militarism. In its attack on militarism the Left Wing would not be pacifist-humanitarian. Militarism is a phenomenon inherent in a class society. Only working class opposition to militarism is to be sought. And the anti-militarism campaign is to be fought solely on a class basis. Individual "conscience," "scruples," "democracy," "justice," "liberty," and "inviolable rights" constitute the present Socialist Party's ammunition in its attack on militarism. The Left Wing does intend to take a hand in "settling" the "immediate" issue of militarism. But it does not intend to fight militarism by means of petty bourgeois, eighteenth-century phraseology. The Left Wing will expose the class nature of militarism and thus enlighten the proletariat as to its dangers.

As to political prisoners a Communist Party would agitate continually for their release. No appeal would be made to bourgeois democrats and "idealists." There would be no cooperation with all sorts of "radicals" in order to save the peoples "conscience" and "individuality." Mass demonstrations and political strikes would be urged. Continuous propaganda would be made among factory workers in order to show them the class nature of capitalist law, justice, and order. An appeal would be made solely to the working class to show its power and compel the bourgeoisie to release all class-war prisoners. Only when the proletariat will be strong enough to force the bourgeoisie to release the champions of labor will the class-war prisoners be freed. To rely on capitalist mercy or appeal to the fairness and justice of bourgeois democracies is to be criminally negligent towards proletarian interests. But to endeavor to promote class-consciousness and class power by means of this "immediate demand" is to be preparing the working class for the revolution.

We must now ask ourselves whether these "reforms" sanctioned by the capitalist State and sanctified by moderate Socialism are really efficacious. First of all, assume that there is certain social legislation which if carried out would be of benefit to the working class. Many States, either because of labor unrest or excessive physical deterioration of the laborer, have put on their Statute books certain laws aimed at alleviating the distress among the workers. But—how many of these are enforced by the State authorities representing "all the people?" What's more, to what extent will these be enforced unless the workers, in the industries concerned, take matters into their own hands and strike for their enforcement? This is social legislation—in the factory and by the factory hands themselves. The