

## TOWARDS CLARITY\*

### A Plea for the Proletarian Party

By JOHN KERACHER

Almost two years have passed since the big split in the Socialist Party that brought into existence other parties claiming to be worthy of the support of the laboring masses. In looking over this period one has no difficulty of observing the numerous mistakes that have been made, but we would be blind indeed if we did not at the same time note wonderful progress in the development of revolutionary understanding.

To say that the split took place too soon, that it would have been better had it come two years later is to state an obvious truth. Also it is easy enough to blame those, who through revolutionary fervor, forced the issue within the Socialist Party before the rank and file was ready. But history is not made according to a perfect, preconceived plan. Especially is this true of working-class movements. The workers learn through mistakes. The forward-moving vanguard may stumble and fall, but stunned at first, they rise again and, profiting from their experiences, move forward steadier and firmer.

With the signing of the Armistice in November, 1918, when the Proletarian Revolution in Russia was fully a year old, there began a movement within the Socialist Party which in the course of time developed into the "Left Wing" of late lamented memory.

The Left Wing, in spite of its mistakes, was a movement in the right direction, a decided advance over the chauvinism of the Socialist Party's official position. The objective was to "Capture the Socialist Party for Revolutionary Socialism." It was not long, however, until it became quite apparent (to those within our ranks who had done any serious thinking and study of Marxism) that those who were to do the capturing did not themselves understand Revolutionary Socialism. The weapons with which they hoped to capture the Socialist Party were little more than "revolutionary wind." The only element within the Left Wing—yet not properly of it—that offered any criticism of the windy policy, haste and confusion, that was developing at an overwhelming speed, was the "Michigan Movement."

In the "Proletarian" (May, 1919) Dennis E. Batt said: "As one looks over the different Manifestos which have recently been issued, the thought arises that there is a danger that the Left-Wing tendency now developing may swing to the other side of the arc and become as reactionary in one direction as the fight is in the other. Space does not permit a detailed analysis of the various manifestos, yet a general tendency may be noted. *All seem to be predicated upon the idea that 'the revolution is just around the corner.'* They seem to lose sight of the fact that the capitalist system as it exists in this

country shows no sign of collapse in the immediate future; at least there seems to be no evidence of weakness. It may be a case where the wish is father to the thought. There is a tendency in some of these manifestos to lose sight of the political factor and lean towards the anarchist position. We must not forget that the first thing which the workers must do is to raise the Proletariat to the position of the ruling class. We must gain control of the political state. With a few exceptions the manifestos which have come to our attention have either ignored or slighted this factor."

It will be remembered that in those days a regular epidemic of "Mass Action" broke out, a form of "left sickness" that the movement has more or less recovered from.

The "Michigan Group" opposed this substituting of slogans for revolutionary principles and the careless use of such catchy revolutionary-sounding phrases as "Mass Action."

In the period between the expulsion of the Left-Wing elements and the organizing of the Communist Parties great enthusiasm prevailed, and a deal of controversy over tactics. Many of us in our partisan stand failed to learn from other groups. In spite of the fantastic "Mass Action" program of the Left Wing there was much to be learned from it. On the other hand, the "Mass-actionists" could have learned a deal from those who insisted upon participation in parliamentary elections, it might have kept them out of the impossible position they are now in with regard to this important tactic.

The literature that has come from Russia has done more to clarify these tactical questions than anything that has been written in this country. Especially is this true of Lenin's works, "The State and Revolution," "The Proletarian Revolution," and "Leftism, the Infantile Sickness of Communism." The "Infantile Sickness" might have been written with the American Movement in mind, so well does it fit the mistakes made by the Left Wing.

But where are those who were formerly the Left Wing? Have they profited by their mistakes? Are they willing to correct the present mistakes?

Many who once played a leading part are no longer with the movement; others have left the country; some are in prison. The bulk of the membership that moved to the left is not affiliated with any party now. Of those that remain, the majority, including practically all the foreign-language groups, are "underground." In the open, the Proletarian Party, composed at this time of English-speaking branches only, takes its stand upon the conditions laid down by the Third International with a manifesto and program which is a complete endorsement of these principles. The manifesto is quite long and covers all essential tactics. The platform is brief and reads as follows: "The Prole-

tarian Party has for its immediate aim the dictatorship of the Proletariat, with all political power in the hands of the working class; for its ultimate aim the communist society, based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means of wealth production."

This party is in a position to live up to the parliamentary requirements of the Third International; it has recently added several new locals and has a future, even if unity is not effected between the Communist elements. Of the Communist Parties it is difficult to speak, for various reasons. It is difficult to tell how they stand in membership, but it appears that the "Communist Party," although numerically the largest, is almost entirely made up of Russians and Lithuanians, and has practically no English-speaking members.

The "United" Communist Party, although smaller, apparently has a minority section of English-speaking members. These two parties which, during the Palmer raids in January, 1920, organized "underground" (in many cases the membership came out of prison with their structure of organization already formed) followed their natural bent and repudiated parliamentary action entirely by adopting a platform of insurrection.

Since the issuing by the Third International of the twenty-one conditions for party affiliation, these parties have changed their policy somewhat. Especially is this true of the United Communist Party, whose latest program is a great improvement over their former "left-sickness." They may now be considered to be more or less convalescent, although still quite outside of the requirements of the Communist International.

On the important matter of participation in parliamentary elections, their program entirely begs the question. Still the advance towards a sound tactical position is marked.

The old contempt for those who favored study classes for party members has disappeared and they are really trying to understand and teach Marxism. The implication, however, still clings

that it is their intention to remain an underground party for years to come. This is not only an obvious mistake but a violation of the conditions laid down by the Communist International.

That parliamentarism is not "historically outlived" for the American masses is plainly to be seen by the result of the last Presidential election when about twenty-five million votes were cast. The gauge of maturity, universal suffrage, that Engels speaks of, as reaching the boiling point, as far as the workers of this country are concerned, is nearer to freezing point. This important feature in the struggle here is so lightly brushed aside by those parties that it shows plainly that they have not fully recovered from their "left-sickness."

Open contact with the working masses, propagating the principles of Communism and the name of the party in their midst, is the way to win the support of the working class and turn it against the capitalist system.

Now a few words in conclusion about the Socialist Party and also those who have no party affiliation at this time. Within the ranks of the Socialist Party there has developed a rank-and-file demand for unqualified endorsement of the Third International. Under pressure of this demand some of the old leaders may try to profit by leading a new "Left Wing" to victory (?). We may witness another attempt to "capture" the Socialist Party for "revolutionary" Socialism. Marx tells us in his "Eighteenth Brumaire" that history repeats itself, "once as tragedy and again as farce." The first attempt was tragic enough, are we now going to witness the farce?

Those who are now outside of party ranks, or those who are ready to change, would do well to combine their efforts in the building of a sound Communist movement in harmony with the present developments in this country. The Proletarian Party has shown the way. There is no need for more organizations as it will only result in making the unity of the truly revolutionary elements more difficult.

## Significance of the Order of the Red Flag

Speech by the Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs, Comrade Trotsky

Comrades:

The All-Russian Central Executive Committee—the highest power in Soviet Russia—has created several months ago a special emblem of distinction for the bravest and most self-sacrificing fighters in the Red Army—the Order of the Red Flag. One may wonder what difference there is between this Order and those of the old Czar or any bourgeois army.

No, comrades, the apparent similarity is only in the name. The meaning of it is quite different. Decorations in bourgeois armies serve for the representatives of the possessing classes as means for further gains, for more and higher distinctions, and for advancement in social status.

Our decoration, on the other hand, does not offer any special privileges or bounties. We erect monuments to our fallen fighters. We write odes about the bravest. For there is a desire in the human heart to pay homage with love and devotion to those in

our midst who, with their bravery, heroism and energy, have served more than others the common cause of the proletarian revolution.

And why shall we not distinguish these heroic soldiers who, with self-abnegation, are bravely shedding their blood for the proletarian cause?

The Order of the Red Flag does not mean that a given soldier is isolated among the others. No! There is inscribed on the Order: "Workers of All Countries, Unite!" This inscription serves as a constant reminder that our cause depends not on individual soldiers, nor even on the whole army, but upon the entire working class, and not only the Russian, but the workers of the world. This order serves also as an appeal to the conscience of all. Look at the most distinguished and do likewise. Let there be among us competition only in heroism, bravery and self-sacrifice in the struggle for the cause of the International Working Class.

\* This article is an expression of the writer's opinion. The Editorial Board, of course, does not assume any responsibility for its viewpoint or conclusions.