

A Ship on the Rocks

By J. LOUIS ENGDAHL

The Socialist Party has held its 9th and probably its last National Convention. It is impossible to discuss the fatal acts of the Detroit gathering in June without also commenting on the effect that those acts have already had on the party membership and the party sympathizers.

Two years ago the Socialist Party went on the rocks. It is still there, only it is much worse for the battering it has received.

The experienced mariner, sticking by his ship, usually struggles to get it off the rocks and into deep water again, where it can be successfully and safely navigated.

Not so with those who have control over the destinies of the Socialist Party ship. They sent it on the rocks in Chicago, in 1919; they kept it there at the New York Convention in 1920, and in Detroit, this June, 1921, they made absolutely certain that that ship would never leave the rocks, except as a mass of shattered wreckage.

The struggle at Detroit for a closer alignment with the Third International was overwhelmingly defeated. Affiliation without reservations, on the basis of the 21 points, as advocated by the writer, was snowed under by a vote of 31 to 4.

Affiliation with reservations, as approved by the New York Convention, one year ago, was defeated in this convention by a vote of 26 to 13.

The "Neutrality" Fake.

Don't think for a moment that there is any "neutrality" involved in the proposition that was adopted, declaring for a "Hands Off" policy toward all Internationals, until the party in this country shall have developed a strong organization.

Communications from the Second International were received, read and acted on at the August meeting of the Socialist Party Executive Committee. Questions of international relations are referred to Morris Hillquit, who definitely proclaims, as his opinion, that "the communist wave is receding."

The position is clear. The Detroit declaration leaves every party editor, every party speaker, every party writer, free to attack and vilify the Third International, to his own satisfaction. That is already being done.

This situation is developed in the action on the resolution of National Secretary Otto Branstetter, unanimously re-elected by the party N. E. C. in August, to expel all Third Internationalists from the party.

With all the noise that was made in favor of this resolution before the convention took place, we find only two votes cast in favor of it, and one of these came from Delegate Flanagan, Georgia, who voted for the 21 points. Flanagan announced that if it was a crime to favor the Third International, then he was guilty of that crime. The other vote came from Delegate Lewis, Socialist mayor of Elwood, Ind. Most of the Third Internationalists in the convention refrained from voting.

Yet the fact that Berger and others voted against

the Branstetter resolution that did not mean that they were opposed to it.

"We'll take care of this situation when we get back home," is the way the Socialist boss of Milwaukee put it.

And Berger does take care of every situation that arises. He already has interpreted, in the columns of the Milwaukee Leader, the Detroit "neutrality" resolution on international relations, by continuing his attack on the Third International, and all that it stands for. Other reactionary forces within the party will do the same.

Timidity is not one of Berger's characteristics. Brazen opportunism is his chief stock in trade. He opposes the dictatorship of the proletariat, sneers at soviet rule, and seeks to ridicule other fundamentals of the working class struggle for power, because they are not needed in the race for the jobs in Wisconsin.

Berger Lines Them Up.

It is Berger's brazen opportunism that lines up the adventurous delegates who would wander into the jungles of the class struggle.

There were four delegates therefore, who drifted far enough away from the ideas of the discredited Second International to proclaim themselves for the so-called Vienna Working Union of Socialist Parties, the 2½ International. There was Hoehn, of Missouri, and King, of California, as shining champions of the Vienna gathering that, in order to appear radical and revolutionary, had adopted the principles of the dictatorship and of soviet rule.

But when these two subjects came up for discussion and action, Hoehn, King and the rest quickly sought the protecting shelter of the Milwaukee band wagon. The convention took no stand on the questions of the dictatorship of the proletariat and of soviet power, two more "neutral" positions that will leave the party forces free to attack these two fundamentals of the working class struggle whenever occasion requires.

"Leave the definition of these terms to our grandchildren," said Berger, who, of course, is not willing to wait for his grand children to tell him what position to take, even on the question of the realization of Socialism, far beyond the period of dictatorship and transition. What Berger means, of course, is hands off this question, everybody, excepting himself.

Hillquit Discovers "Dictatorship."

It was last year at the New York convention that Morris Hillquit bitterly attacked the principle of the dictatorship. It meant violence, bloodshed, the red terror, everything that all "true Socialists" should turn away from. It was Hillquit's big attack on the minority declaration of principles. His position then was that the idea of the dictatorship was alien to all Socialist philosophy.

At Detroit, 1921, we find Hillquit trying to define the meaning of the "dictatorship." It is, he says, "The political rule of the working class in the

period of transition from the capitalist system to the Socialist order. It is not necessarily associated with a restriction of the political rights of opponents, or with violence or terror."

Hillquit was even willing to make this slight concession to the effort to get the Socialist ship off the rocks and back to Socialism. But in vain. There were five propositions on the question of the dictatorship before the convention.

"Kill 'em all!" shouted the Socialist mayor of Milwaukee, the Communist-eater, Daniel W. Hoan. And kill them all, they did.

For the first time a mild declaration on the use of the general strike for political and economic purposes was favored by a Socialist Party convention. Shades of the Albany trial of the ousted Socialist assemblymen, where it was denied that the Socialist Party favored the use of the strike weapon for political purposes!

But this was one of those flukes that sometimes occur. Mayor Hoan, of Milwaukee, was more anxious to secure the adoption of a fusion plan than he was opposed to a mild general strike declaration. He schemed accordingly.

Open Way to Fusion.

To serve his end, Hoan became a raving extremist, offered a resolution to call all working-class organizations together next year, in lieu of the annual Socialist convention, and thus get together on a plan for a General Strike Program for the political prisoners.

Then speaker after speaker attacked the policy of isolation of the Socialist Party. And King, of California, forgot all about the general strike for the political prisoners, urging hurry-up fusion to take advantage of the congressional elections next year.

Hillquit again tried to save a few pieces from the wreckage of the Socialist ship, being battered now harder than ever. He urged that the Party National Executive Committee merely get in touch with other organizations, and then report next year. It was a move for delay, nothing more. And in the meantime the local organizations of the party will do pretty much as they please on the question of fusion.

To be sure, Nikolai Lenin urged that the British Communist Party, formerly the British Socialist Party, apply for affiliation with the British Labor Party, on the basis of no surrender of principle. The Labor Party, at its recent congress, refused that affiliation. On the basis of no surrender of Socialist principle, not one political organization, so-called, of the workers in America, would co-operate with the Socialist Party. But the surrender of principle has proceeded so far that coalition would be superfluous. Complete fusion is inevitable, and this means the end of the Socialist Party.

Where the convention did take a stand, the effort was meaningless in view of the prevailing local autonomy within the party.

Centralization vs. "57 Varieties."

Similarly the so-called powers of supervision given the national executive committee over elected

officials and over the party press. Meyer London, the lone Socialist congressman, didn't even take the trouble to attend the convention. Instead he sent a letter. And the New York Call, the Milwaukee Leader and Oklahoma Leader, not to mention the various weeklies, will suit their policies to their local conditions and local leaderships. There will be no Moscow discipline in the party, not even at the expense of having "57 varieties" of Socialist Parties throughout the country.

That is where the Socialist Party finds itself after two years on the rocks, a position perfectly satisfactory to most of its present leadership. The convention issued a call for \$20,000.00 in 30 days. The call declares that, "we raise this minimum of \$20,000.00 within not more than 30 days or the National Office quits its activities and closes its doors."

That is blunt enough. The struggle for *Socialism*, according to the Detroit Convention, is not one of spirit and sacrifice. It is a mere matter of dollars and cents. If the money is forthcoming, the party lives, whether or no it has Socialist spirit or principle. That was the thought of the Spargoes, Russells and others, who built the Social-Democratic League and similar organizations to wreck the Socialist Party during the war. Spargo, Russell, et al, had money. It will be shown that they were subsidized by the government. But they got nowhere. The renegades failed to rally a corporal's guard in their support.

What will the effect of the Detroit convention's desertion of principle be upon the party? Although a favorable attitude was taken on the question of foreign language federations, we find that two of these federations, the Bohemian and Jewish, paying no attention to this sop thrown to them, have voted to leave the party.

Deserting the Ship.

The Bohemian and Jewish federations refuse to go down with the wreckage. Others will join them. It was last winter that the national executive committee discovered the theory that the Third International was one thing, that the Russian Soviet Republic was something else, apart from it and even hostile to it. Few could understand this theory, especially the members of the Finnish Federation, 8,000 strong. So they left the party. But a few hesitated. Wait for the Detroit convention, they said. Perhaps the theory of the national executive committee will be exploded. But it wasn't. And any Finns that might have remained in the party, now join the exodus.

Time will show that what is true of the Bohemians, Jews, Finns, and other foreign nationalities, is also true of large numbers of members in the English branches.

The more than 100,000 members that the Socialist Party had two years ago are on the march. They have left the Detroit Convention stalled far in the rear, groping about in the quagmires of indecision and stupidity, where the renegades in the Farmer Labor Party and other similar organizations are also floundering, fretting and fuming.

In the meantime the Socialist Party ship remains upon the rocks, battered and helpless, unable to weather the seas where old Socialist ideas battle to meet new conditions.