

The Rise and Fall of the Socialist Party

By BENJAMIN GLASSBERG

The story of the decline and decay of the Socialist Party can be described most graphically through its membership figures. Up to 1912, it grew steadily, rising from 15,975 in 1903, two years after its organization, to 118,045 in 1912, when it reached its high-water mark. It was then one of the largest Socialist parties in the world.

It was in 1912 that the struggle over the famous Section 6, anti-sabotage clause, broke loose, with the result that about twenty thousand members withdrew from the party. The party never again reached the membership it had prior to its efforts to pose as an anti-violence organization. Following 1912, there was a slow but steady decrease in membership, which was for a time accelerated by the entrance of the United States in the war. Locals in outlying, rural sections fell early victims to the holy war for Democracy.

In 1918 the membership began to take a turn upward. In January, 1918, it reached 86,650; in March it had gone up to 101,571; in December, however, it fell to 84,495. In 1919 there was once more an upward movement; in March, just when the dissatisfaction with the compromising attitude of the party was making itself felt, resulting in the organization of left-wing elements in various sections of the country, the membership had gone up to 101,313.

The dispute within the party and the efforts made by the officialdom to maintain control let loose forces which very soon split the party wide open, and in the course of about two years brought the party membership far below what it was in 1903. In December, 1919, three months after the organization of the Communist and Communist Labor Parties, the Socialist Party had remaining 31,738 members. The average for 1920, aided by the Albany affair, fell to 26,766. For the first five months of 1921, the average dropped still further, to 17,464, consisting of 13,262 English speaking members and 4,182 in the various foreign-language federations. The decrease was due largely to the withdrawal of the Finnish Federation because of utter disgust with the party's international position.

As an indication of the now rapid disintegration of the Socialist Party, it should be noted that since the infamous Detroit Convention, the Jewish and Bohemian Federations have both voted to withdraw from the party, which means a loss of at least 1,500 members. At the recent meeting of the party executive committee, the membership of the English-speaking sections was reported to average between six and seven thousand for the last three months. If what is left of the language federations be added to this, it would leave at most a membership of 9,000 for a party which only two years ago boasted of more than 100,000, at a time when a party like the French had no more than 40,000. Retribution has come mighty rapidly to the party and policies of Berger and Hillquit.

The average annual membership figures are as follows:

Going Up!

1903	15,975
1904	20,763
1905	23,327
1906	26,784
1907	29,270
1908	41,751
1909	41,470
1910	58,011
1911	84,716
1912	118,045

Adopts "Section 6," Down!

1913	95,957
1914	93,579
1915	79,374
1916	83,284

The Anti-War stand: Up!

1917	80,379
1918	82,344
1919 (first 3 months) *	104,822

Anti-Third International. Down!

1919 (last 3 months) **	34,926
1920	26,766
1921 (first 7 months)	14,934
May, 1921,	9,919
June, 1921,	12,024
July, 1921,	5,781

* Before the split in the party

** After the split in the party.

July, 1921, the month following the Detroit Convention, showed dues stamps sold totalling only 5,781, which means the passing "down and out" of the Socialist Party as a national organization.

"FAREWELL!" TO SOCIALIST PARTY

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The Workers' Council

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Left — The Same Old Rotten Eggs



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