

Socialism and Reformism in Italy

By ALEXANDER TRACHTENBERG

THE Italian Socialist Party announced its adherence to the Third International in March, 1919, thru a decision of its National Executive Committee. This act was ratified later in the year by an overwhelming vote of the delegates at the Bologna Congress.

The Italian party was the first Socialist party of size and influence to join the nascent revolutionary International. While the news of its adherence to the Moscow organization was of more than casual interest, it did not come as a surprise to informed Socialists.

By throwing its lot with the Third International, the Italian party rounded out a Socialist and internationalist career of which any workers' party could be proud.

Took Stand Against War

Thruout the critical years of the war the party remained faithful to International Socialism.

It supported the Zimmerwald and Kienthal movements organized by the Socialist minorities of the belligerent countries in opposition to the social patriotic activities of the Socialist parties of those countries.

It withdrew from the International Socialist Bureau and declined to send delegates to the Berne conference which was sponsored by that Bureau in an attempt to resuscitate the shattered Second International.

The Inter-Allied Socialist and Labor Conference, another social-patriotic conclave, was denounced by the Italian Socialists, and when the American "Socialist" and Labor delegation came to convert them to an espousal of the "democratic" war aims, it was met with derision.

Denounced the "Class Peace"

The Italian party maintained its revolutionary tradition and, together with the Socialist minorities of other European countries, spoke to the workers of the world against the imperialist war and denounced the class peace of the Socialist majorities.

When the minorities later joined the victorious Russian Socialists in forming the Third International as a protest against the traitorous behavior of the leading parties of the Second International, the Italian party became a member of the new revolutionary body.

The Second Congress of the Third International promulgated the famous 21 points which, among other things, demanded of the various adhering parties that they cleanse their ranks of reformers and pure-and-simple parliamentarians.

While the Italian party consisted in the main of revolutionary Socialists, it had, nevertheless, a strong reformist element believed to be a danger-

ous factor during the impending revolutionary struggles in Italy.

The reformists included an array of parliamentary and labor leaders of great repute and influence in the Socialist and labor movements. Turati, Treves, Modigliani, Prampolini, D'Aragona and others made no secret of their reformist tendencies, and the party always had to keep close watch over their activities.

Serrati Turns "to the Right"

The Third International advised the Italian party to drop these reformist leaders and free itself of their pernicious influence. The leadership of the party was in the hands of people who put unity above everything else. Serrati, member of the Executive Committee of the Third International and recognized leader of the party, altho realizing the hardship which retaining the reformist element would entail, bitterly opposed the expulsion of Turati and his followers from the party.

Under the leadership of Serrati, the majority of the party delegates at the Livorno Congress last January refused to ratify the 21 points.

The Left faction at the convention, which claimed a following of about 50,000 members, withdrew and organized a Communist Party. Unconditional affiliation with the Third International was voted by the new organization.

Lose 50,000 to Gain 14,000

The "Unitarians," representing the majority of the party, allowed the split with a loss of 50,000 members in order to retain a reformist following of about 14,000.

The representative of the Third International at the Livorno Congress, the Bulgarian Communist Kabatchkov, contributed to the conditions which brought about the split.

The opinion still prevails in some Communist quarters that the Third International erred in permitting the Left in the Italian party to withdraw at that time.

It is maintained that a way should have been found to isolate all truly revolutionary elements from the reformists, and retain the powerful Italian party in the Third International.

Notwithstanding the desertion of the Communists, and the refusal to accept the 21 points, the Socialist Party adopted at Livorno the so-called Bentivoglio resolution providing for negotiation with the Third International for continued affiliation.

Demand for Collaboration Grows

It was under this resolution that a delegation consisting of the former secretary of the party, the veteran Lazzari, Dr. Maffi and Riboldi attended

the Third Congress of the Communist International last July to lay the matter of the Italian party before the International.

No sooner had the heat of the memorable controversy at Livorno died out when the Socialist Party began to feel the effects of the unholy alliance with reformism.

Instead of being able to control it, it saw reformism raise its head and threaten to attack the party at its most revered tradition. The reformists began to demand collaboration with other parties. The goal of pure-and-simple parliamentarism is participation in the government.

Those who can read Socialist history aright can foresee the future of the Italian Socialist Party if it should choose to go the way the collaborationists have charted for it.

When the Third International made it mandatory upon the Italian party to break with the reformists, the party pleaded for the right to retain them and tried to persuade the International that the Italian reformists were different from those in other countries, that they were harmless, and that the party could exercise complete control over them.

Just Like Reformists Here

While it is true that compared with the leadership of the American Socialist Party, the Italian reformists appear as revolutionists, yet their characteristic features are the same.

Parliamentarism, instead of being an aid in the revolutionary struggle, has become with them an end in itself. Instead of battle cries born out of the class struggle, they have inscribed on their pink banners—votes, offices, legislative measures as goals of their strivings.

Those who watch over the destinies of Italian Socialism know the danger which lies in the course advocated by the Turati elements. The agitation of the latter must have reached an acute stage if the National Executive Committee of the party decided to call an extraordinary convention to deal with this issue.

The Convention took place in Milan, October 8-12. The party administration declared in its manifesto to the members that it considered it incompatible with the class character of Italian Socialism to sponsor participation in bourgeois governments and announced that the Socialist Party had no place for those who favored such a policy.

Zetkin Speaks for "The Third"

The question of dealing with the reformists was bound up with the question of affiliation with the Third International. Clara Zetkin, who made as spectacular an appearance at Milan as she did at Tours, when the French government did not allow her to enter the country, pointed out to the Italian Socialists in behalf of the Executive Committee of the International, that the party must break with the reformists before it could claim complete adherence to the International.

Clara Zetkin was among those whose voices were raised against the tactics of the Third International at Livorno. She could view the Italian situation with sympathy. She now saw that the

Italian Socialists themselves began to fear the growing strength of the reformists in the party.

Unfortunately, in addition to Clara Zetkin, the Executive Committee of the International also sent to the Milan Congress the Polish Communist Waleski. His attitude was not conducive to a friendly understanding.

The cudgels of the fight for a complete break with the Turati elements were taken up by the delegation to the Third Congress. Altogether four resolutions were presented which dealt with the question of collaboration:

1. Turati demanded open collaboration with the bourgeois government. He wanted the party committed to the policy of participation in the cabinet without reservations.

2. Alessandri proposed a modification of the Turati position. He favored collaboration only under certain circumstances.

3. Serrati was opposed to collaboration. He favored complete control and discipline over party members. Those favoring collaboration must abide by the decision of the party on the question. Unity must be maintained, and if membership in the Third International meant a rupture with a portion of the party membership, he was for unity first of all.

Urge Adherence to Moscow

4. Lazzari sponsored the unconditional affiliation with the Third International, the ratification of the 21 points and the removal from the party of the ever present danger of neutralizing the revolutionary and class struggle character of the party by expelling the reformists.

Lazzari and his co-delegates who went to Moscow to argue for the Serrati position came back convinced that the policies of the latter were becoming a menace to the Socialist movement in Italy. They called upon the party to go with the Third International as that was a guarantee against the possible disintegration of the party both in principle and members.

The Serrati position again prevailed. The party has become altogether detached from the Third International and is now drifting.

Like Haase in Germany

Serrati's attitude reminds one of the position the late Hugo Haase took as chairman of the German Social-Democratic Party. He was opposed to the social-patriotic policy of the Scheidemann majority. He was opposed to voting war credits and making a class peace with the German Government. But he would not support the Liebknecht attitude of rebellion against the rule of the majority. Unity of the party was then uppermost in his mind. Only when the majority betrayed every Socialist principle the party ever stood for, did Haase agree that a break was necessary and joined in the formation of the Independent Socialist Party.

How long will Serrati have to wait to realize that the reformist policy of the Turati faction is an ever present danger within the Socialist Party? The time came when Haase had to declare that unity of principle was more important than unity of organization. When will Serrati be ready to utter the same truth?