

The Socialist Party—A Victim of Inner Contradictions

By ALEXANDER TRACHTENBERG

THE forced and voluntary exodus of revolutionists from the Socialist Party did not make the party entirely useless.

Tho only a shadow of the old organization, the party can yet serve a necessary purpose in American political life.

The party has become too discredited among the militant portion of the American working class to parade as a revolutionary organization.

If it should attempt to play such a role, it would be our duty to mercilessly expose it and warn the workers against the snares and delusions of the party's reformism.

A RESPECTABLE PARTY

On the contrary, the ruling elements in the party are now anxious to advertise the organization as thoroly cleared of all "anarcho-communists" (a darling expression of a Socialist historian who lost his historical sense in the scuffle) and that it is ready to accept the adherence of all those who prefer the "native" Jefferson to the "foreigner" Marx, and are willing to do something for poor brother Labor.

It is precisely this function that the "S. P." can now perform without fear of being disturbed by troublesome elements within its fold, and it should do the job most admirably.

Many theories have been advanced to explain the disintegration of the Socialist Party as a revolutionary organization.

The sundry reasons always appeared to the writer as results rather than causes of the party's undoing. The Socialist Party was never a homogeneous organization, and its attempt at Socialist efforts was neutralized by the incessant struggle of the two mutually antagonistic elements which comprised the organization.

A POLITICAL CONGLOMERATION

The party never had the chance. It was never allowed to develop as a revolutionary and class party.

Middle-class social reformers and proletarian revolutionists made the Socialist Party the vehicle of their political activities and aspirations.

Jeffersonian ideologists, who were trying to adapt bourgeois democracy to the class struggle were found in the "S. P.," together with Marxian Socialists who denied the existence of abstract liberties and put forth proletarian hegemony as against capitalist dictatorship.

All parties of the Second International had an admixture of elements fundamentally hostile to the ultimate aims of revolutionary Socialism, but the American party was blessed with an overdose of them.

Unlike other countries, there never developed in the United States a liberal political party which could act as a receiving station for the disillusioned in the conservative camps.

Both the Republican and Democratic parties were instruments of capitalism and reaction. The periodic change from the administration of one to the govern-

ment of the other was only a pro forma change. Real power always rested with the same interests—the two parties only taking turns in representing them and carrying out their commands.

JUMP TO SOCIALIST PARTY

Those who sought to promote political and economic improvements and realized that that was not possible of accomplishment thru either of the two political parties, wended their ways to the Socialist Party, because there was no intermediary agency better suited to these political interlopers and their pet millennial reforms.

Those who desired to check the control of government by the vested interests and believed they could accomplish it thru direct election of U. S. Senators, the initiative, referendum, recall, woman suffrage, the primary, corrupt practices acts, civil service regulations, public ownership of public utilities, etc.; or those who wanted to make the burden of the worker lighter or protect his life and limbs by compensation and safety legislation, minimum wages, shorter hours, restriction of woman and child labor and other labor laws, and found that they could not obtain these reforms thru either the Republican or Democratic Party, looked to the "S. P." for succor.

During the period of muck-raking in various fields of political and economic endeavor, the "S. P." was receiving numerous additions to its ranks from among disillusioned doctors of variegated social ills.

FARMERS AND SOCIALISM

When the farmers of the middle and southwest became once more embattled (this time against the railroads and the banks) and clamored for lower freight rates, state elevators, cheaper credit and insurance, they found that they could not obtain these remedial measures thru the old parties and joined the "S. P." in droves.

When the European war broke out, the "S. P." became the rallying center for anti-militarists, pacifists, and free speech defenders of all sorts.

Had there been a liberal party when the leftward migration of erstwhile Republicans and Democrats began, the "S. P." would have been spared this assortment of reformers and radicals who entered it not because of its Socialist program, but because it was the third party.

To those with whom the party was a vogue during that period, the ultimate aim to abolish the capitalist system thru a social revolution did not matter.

PARTY SERVED AS OASIS

In the midst of a corrupt political desert the "S. P." was an oasis for all who heard the call of social service and civic duty.

As far as they were concerned the party stood for clean government and for improvements in the various fields of social and economic relations.

It served the purpose which European liberal parties served for many years and, tho the "doctrinaire" attitude of the Marxian contingent often gave the radicals cause for worry, they were will-

ing to put up with their obdurate fellow-members in order to have a political roof over their heads.

It is needless to say that such elements could not furnish proper material for the building of a well-knit and disciplined revolutionary party. In times of peace the organization, which looked more like a social club than a political party, was able to get along. But when it was put to the test, the structure collapsed like a house of cards.

The emphasis on parliamentary action was primarily due to the influence of the middle class reformers, who were out for "results." Didn't they join the "S. P." because the other parties would not listen to their importunities?

"PRACTICAL" POLITICS WON

Being the most articulate portion of the membership, because of their ability to speak and write, they directed the course of the party along the road of "practical" politics.

Instead of revolutionary Socialist propaganda and participation in the struggles of the workers, vote catching became the alpha and omega of the party's activity. Everything was directed toward that end. All the resources of the party were saved for the most important period of the year—election time, and if the

returns showed an increase in the vote, or the election of a candidate, great was the glory of the party and happy were the leaders.

The methods used in the campaigns never worried those who controlled the destiny of the party. Elections were not means for Socialist propaganda, but ends in themselves, and no chances were to be taken with the outcome of the campaigns.

WRITE THE LAST CHAPTER

The Detroit Convention was the last chapter the party was able to write under the old nom de plume. Complete disintegration followed.

The American Socialist Party bargained away its Socialist soul in its hunt for popularity thru political success. It stands now before the American workers, deprived of its Socialist heritage and barren of even those political results which it set out to achieve.

The inner contradictions have brought the party to its Socialist Waterloo.

The withdrawal of all the Socialist elements makes it impossible for the organization to serve as a dumping ground for all the nondescript liberals and radicals.

The American revolutionary movement cannot but profit by it. It will be removed from the danger of being contaminated by these elements.

HYNDMAN—PILLAR OF REACTION

By LUDWIG LORE

FROM England comes the news of the death of one of the outstanding figures of the Socialist movement of pre-war days. H. M. Hyndman, at the age of 79, is dead.

Hyndman was the founder of the social-democratic movement in England. He created the Social-Democratic Federation, which later became the Social-Democratic Party.

It is a well-known fact that he came into the Socialist movement and remained unceasingly active in its ranks thru more than a generation at the greatest sacrifice of his own personal ambitions.

For Hyndman was the son of a well-to-do family and received the well rounded out education that is traditional in the class from which he sprung.

With his brilliant political insight, his capabilities both as a speaker and as a writer, Hyndman, had he remained true to the standards of the class from which he came, would have become one of the leading statesmen of the nation.

He was, however, constitutionally in sympathy with the under-dog. As a very young man he took the part of oppressed India against its British exploiters. When shortly afterward, in the capacity of newspaper correspondent, he was sent to the front in the war between Italy and Austria, in 1888, he met Mazzini and Garibaldi, and was so attracted toward them that he formed a life-long friendship. The outbreak of the Paris Commune and his acquaintance with Karl Marx during this critical period in European history led Hyndman into the Socialist movement.

But, in spite of his long experience in the British movement and in the International, Hyndman always showed a marked preference for Latin peoples, traditions and customs.

Friedrich Engels once jokingly remarked: "This Hyndman is a splendid internationalist—except when the Germans are under discussion. Then he becomes a violent nationalist."

Such being the case, it is hardly surprising that Hyndman, when the war broke out, became one of the most violent jingoes in the International. He poured the vials of his wrath not only upon the German leaders who openly supported the war-camarilla, but he was equally bitter against those Germans who opposed the war-policies of the German Social-Democracy.

He was firmly convinced of the justice of the Allied cause and defended it with blind vehemence against all who opposed him.

When the Russian Revolution broke out he had no patience with the peace demands of the Russian people, and urged Russia to help the Allies to carry the war to a victorious conclusion. Like every honest social patriot, he had for the Bolsheviks only disapproval and contempt.

Hyndman went the way of so many of our orthodox Marxists, who have lived with their theories so long that they have lost touch with the spirit of the revolution, lost the spark that gives these theories life.

Like Jules Guèsde in France, like Karl Kautsky in Germany, like Plechanov in Russia, he became the spokesman of the enemies of Soviet Russia and of the Third International.

The Paris Commune brought Hyndman, the young revolutionist, into the proletarian movement. Hyndman, the party leader, died as one of the pillars of capitalist reaction.