Laborism and Socialism

An Analysis of the Inter-Allied Socialist and Labor Program on Peace, and the British Labor Party Program on Reconstruction after the War.

By Louis C. Fraina

I.

Socialist activity, activity that is dynamic and prepares the Revolution, consists in expressing fundamental Socialism by means of clear, uncompromising analysis of facts and tendencies as the basis of action, in relating fundamental theory to fundamental practice. If Socialism is in accord with the development of Capitalism, then the realistic policy, the policy of adapting our theory and action to *fundamental* facts and tendencies, is the policy that promotes the Revolution. But the facts and tendencies of Capitalism are multifarious; and revolutionary Socialism, accordingly, consists in appraising and relating itself to those facts and tendencies that are fundamental to Capitalism and the coming of Socialism.

There is a peculiarly naive conception of Socialist activity, which adheres to the slogan, "Teach Socialism!" Under the banner of this slogan two extremes meet—the doctrinaire revolutionist of the Socialist Labor Party, and the pervasive opportunist of the Socialist Party. This attitude evades all actual problems of Socialism: the one, by agitating sterile dogmas; the other, by refusing to deal with decisive problems of action, indulging in all sorts of *petit bourgeois* illusions and reforms. The test of the war has proven the ineptitude of these two extremes. The Socialist Labor Party has played a miserable role during the great crisis, unable to adapt its revolutionary aspirations to immediate problems and practice, evading completely the problems of war and peace; while the Socialist Party opportunists, where they did choose action, chose the action largely of bourgeois pacifism,

which, since the collapse of pacifism, has resolved itself into the theory: War, after all is only an incident in our program; teach Socialism! But what sort of Socialism is it that breaks down under the test of war, that abandons the most important task of relating Socialism to war and formulating an independent, revolutionary policy on war and peace? Teach Socialism—and abandon reality, abandon action, abandon the immediate struggle; teach Socialism—and preach your sterile dogmas which have become perverted into a negation of life, or castrate Socialism by a *petit bourgeois* policy of confusion and compromise, of adopting a multiplicity of "issues" that are wholly alien to fundamental Socialism. One element of the opportunist "teachers of Socialism" evades the problems of the war; while the other accepts the war and its policy of "making the world safe for democracy." In this miserable manner, they reject reality, they reject the determining circumstance that war means a climacteric expression of the fundamental facts and tendencies of Capitalism, on the basis of which alone Socialism may act and conquer.

Precisely the opportunistic attitude is responsible for the enthusiastic acceptance, in some Socialist quarters, of the Inter-Allied Labor and Socialist program on peace and the British Labor Party's program on reconstruction after the war. Uncritical comparisons are made between the proletarian revolution in Russia and these two programs; indeed, many an opportunist in his enthusiasm stresses the labor programs as against the proletarian revolution, implying that the former is immeasurably the more important,— as did Scott Nearing and Algernon Lee at the Radical, Socialist and Labor Conference in April. Now this is sheer nonsense. However important, however revolutionary the Labor programs might be, they are, after all, simply paper programs; they cannot, surely, be as important as an actual proletarian revolution, the assumption of power by the revolutionary proletariat, the development of the *modus operandi* of the Social Revolution. Moreover, the two events are mutually exclusive: the British Labor Party programs and the proletarian revolution in Russia are not comparable except as expressions of fundamentally differing policy. The British Labor Party programs are