

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Failure of the Socialist Party and the Reason Why

When the Socialist Labor Party split in 1900-1901, and gave birth to the Socialist Party, this was a progressive development. The Socialist Labor Party, although some twenty-three years in the field, had not been able to root itself firmly among the American masses. It remained a skeleton organization of the foreign-born, and its program and activities had little immediate relation to the life of the native workers. The main cause of this was its narrow sectarian policy, especially in the previous ten years under the leadership of Daniel De Leon.

In 1900, capitalism was undergoing a very rapid expansion. The working class was also growing swiftly and its grievances and struggles were multiplying. There was an urgent need for a better organization of the workers' struggles, economically and politically, in the light of a revolutionary goal for the working class. In this situation, breaking through the hard sectarian shell of the Socialist Labor Party, the Socialist Party came into existence.

Great hopes were placed in the new organization by the bulk of the revolutionary elements of the time. And during the oncoming years these revolutionary forces put forth the most intense efforts to strengthen the party. Many thousands of workers made the building of the Socialist Party their life's work. They struggled and fought for it, and prepared and distributed seas of propaganda. At times it looked as though their efforts would succeed, for the Socialist Party gradually grew in membership and influence. It appeared that the American party would be able to progress as fast as the rapidly growing Socialist Parties in other capitalist countries.

But since the formation of the Socialist Party thirty-five years have passed, and what do we see? The Socialist Party, into which so much devoted work was put, is today small, stagnant and weak; in fact, is actually declining both in organizational strength and influence. In 1903, the Socialist Party had 15,970 members, and in 1935 it had 19,121 or just about the number it started with a generation before, and it is now rapidly losing membership. The Socialist Party's vote in 1932 was 883,342, or less than the 897,011 which it polled in 1912. Twenty-five years ago the Party's trade union influence also was many times greater than it is at the present time. The Party has long since lost its single representative in Congress. And so it is on all fronts: stagnation and decline. To cap the climax, the Socialist Party is now undergoing a

national split which has thrown the Party into confusion, is causing it a heavy loss in membership, and is generally creating a critical situation.

Obviously, the Socialist Party, like the Socialist Labor Party before it, has failed. That is the meaning of its present crisis. The Socialist Party has not been the means of winning the American masses ideologically for socialism nor of providing them with the necessary effective political organization. The reality of the failure of the Socialist Party is emphasized by the very existence of the Communist Party. It was only because the Socialist Party did not function as an effective revolutionary organization of the American working class that the Communist Party came into being.

### *Success Was Possible*

It is a pertinent question to ask why this miserable showing of the Socialist Party over so many years? Is this the best that could have been done for socialism in the greatest capitalist country in the world? The workers have the right to a correct answer to this question. No party can claim the sole right to carry the banner of socialism unless it can effectively defend it. Self-criticism is a cardinal Leninist virtue and the Socialist Party has great need at present to practice it. The lessons to be learned should be helpful in bringing the Socialist Party out of its present serious crisis.

The customary explanation for the inability of the Socialist Party to grow is that it was because of the great objective difficulties in the United States that it had to contend with. There is much merit in this contention; but as we shall see, it does not explain basically the failure of the Socialist Party.

Among the big objective factors militating against the development of class consciousness among the workers and the building of a revolutionary party in the United States were (a) the existence of plentiful government free land during several generations; (b) the traditionally higher wage and living standards; (c) the development of a large and conservative labor aristocracy made up principally of American-born workers; (d) the presence of millions of low-paid disfranchised immigrant workers of various nationalities, languages, religions and traditions; (e) the passage of large numbers of workers into the ranks of the petty bourgeoisie and many even into the big bourgeoisie during the long period of industrial expansion; (f) the existence of a relatively high degree of the formal democratic rights of free speech, free press, free assembly, to organize and strike, to be elected to any office, the fiction of legalized social equality, etc., which were won by the toilers many

years before in the early stages of the bourgeois revolution and which no longer served as major issues of immediate political struggle (as, for example, they did in Germany, Austria and other European countries).

These many economic, political and social factors undoubtedly tended powerfully to blur class lines, to create bourgeois property illusions among the workers, and to prevent their independent political organization as a class. But they did not stifle the class struggle altogether. Far from it. The American working masses bitterly resented the brutal and ferocious exploitation to which they were subjected, and they resolutely fought against it. This is amply shown by their long history of determined trade union struggles. Prior to the great war no country in the world except tsarist Russia had such a record of violent and fiercely fought strikes as the United States. The workers' strong class instinct and fighting trade union spirit were the raw material out of which a real revolutionary party could have been built. Not as big a party perhaps as in some European countries, yet certainly a strong, healthy, growing organization. But the Socialist Party proved glaringly incapable of educating these discontented masses, of raising their struggle from the economic to the political sphere, and of building a strong party from their ranks. It is our task to learn the reasons why.

### *Why the Socialist Party Failed*

When the Socialist Party broke through the crust of Socialist Labor Party sectarianism and took up its work of education and organization it found indeed a very hard problem before it; one more difficult in fact than that faced by the Socialist Party in any major capitalist country. The working class, in the grip of a tremendous ruling class propaganda, was thoroughly saturated with capitalist illusions; the trade unions were already in the hands of the deeply reactionary Gompers clique; the great mass of workers were still tied to the two big capitalist parties. Therefore, the most elementary work of enlightenment and organization stood before the Party.

In this difficult situation, in order to grow and to put itself at the head of these backward masses, dominated by ruthless capitalist enemies, the Socialist Party had boldly to tackle the great problems of mass education, organization and struggle confronting it. It had to militantly wrest the leadership of the masses out of the hands of the capitalists and their labor agents. It had to be a fighting party, a party of militant proletarian class struggle.

This meant that to develop such a policy of Marxian class struggle, the Socialist Party had to fulfill two major and basic conditions: (1) to

give active political leadership to the workers in their everyday fights for immediate and burning economic and political demands; and (2) systematically to educate its own membership and mass following in the principles of Marxian Socialism. Only in this manner could the Socialist Party come forward as the real vanguard of the workers in the class struggle and at the same time build up a strong body of revolutionary fighters to serve as the very foundation and structure of the Party and all its work.

The validity of such a policy of Marxian class struggle is demonstrated by the whole history of the American labor movement. No organization can make headway against the powerful American capitalist class without an aggressive, fighting policy. For example, the trade unions have always grown most in their periods of greatest militancy, and stagnated most in their periods of intensest class collaboration. Recent expressions of this truth were the rapid expansion of the trade unions during the great strike wave of 1933-1934, and the paralyzing decay that set in among them during the period of widespread class collaboration in the so-called good times from 1923 to 1929.

Another elementary proof of the effectiveness and correctness of the policy of class struggle is furnished by the growth of the Communist Party in numbers and influence. Although the Communist Party is only half as old as the Socialist Party it has about four times as many members. It is also unified and healthy, while the Socialist Party is torn with factionalism. The Communist Party, moreover, has had to face far greater persecution than was ever the case with the Socialist Party, exemplified by the Palmer Red raids in which thousands were arrested, wholesale expulsions from the trade unions and industries by reactionary American Federation of Labor leaders, violent attacks by the capitalist press, government deportations, etc. The growth of the Communist Party in the face of these difficulties is to be ascribed to its brave and tireless class struggle policy.

Still another demonstration of the correctness of the class struggle policy is provided by the history of the Socialist Party itself. The best periods of growth of the Socialist Party were exactly those in which its policies, because of Left wing pressure, took on more of a class struggle character (thus 1907-1912), and it was exactly during those periods in which the Socialist Party plunged most deeply into class collaboration (for example, 1923-1932) that the Party was weakest and least effective in the class struggle.

From all this we are led directly to the principal cause of the Socialist Party's failure historically. This failure was caused precisely by

the fact that, except upon rare occasions, the Socialist Party has not carried on a policy of class struggle. On the contrary, its traditional course has been one of opportunism, of reformism, of class collaboration. Throughout its history the Socialist Party has flagrantly violated the two fundamentals necessary to the development of the Marxian class struggle policy required for the building of a revolutionary party in the given American conditions. That is, (1) it has not come forward as the militant leader of the toiling masses in their daily struggle over urgent economic and political issues, but, instead, has systematically evaded assuming such leadership; (2) it has not striven to build up a strong body of revolutionary Marxian understanding among the Party membership and mass following, but, on the contrary, has definitely hindered and checked the growth of such revolutionary education.

The reformist, opportunist policy which the Socialist Party has traditionally followed was the natural consequence of the composition of its decisive leading forces. From its inception, the Socialist Party attracted many elements of the city petty bourgeoisie who were feeling acutely the pressure of the trusts upon the middle class and who had no faith in the two old parties, but who in no sense were Marxian revolutionaries. Hence the Party became infested with a horde of lawyers, doctors, preachers, professors, journalists, small businessmen, with an occasional "millionaire" Socialist thrown in. And they, extra-vocal and very energetic, soon arrived at complete domination over the Party.

These people, the Hillquits, Bergers, Works, Wallings, Spargos, Russels, Myers, Waylands, Simons, Harrimans, Bensons, Stokes, etc., etc., were not revolutionists. They were radicals, the Left wing of the petty bourgeoisie which was being crushed by monopoly capital and which had no party of its own. Over and above mere wordy differences between them, the decisive idea animating them all was to build the Socialist Party into a sort of progressive-populist party. To this end they advocated opportunist policies of government and municipal ownership of industry and various minor legislative reforms, with the general idea of some day transforming capitalism into socialism through a peaceful process of the workers voting themselves into power and then legally buying out the industries.

The general conception of the proletariat's role by these middle class elements was to serve as an instrument of the petty bourgeoisie in its fight for self-preservation against the advancing big capitalists. To them the class struggle of the workers was essentially something foreign, something, at best, that they only had a dilettante interest in and which, at worst, was a danger to their vote-catching and class collabo-

ration schemes. Consequently, the middle class, intellectual leaders of the Party throughout its history played down every manifestation of working class fighting spirit. And all the way along through the years they distorted or suppressed the teaching of Marxism to the Party members and following and used their own power to check the development of, and even to drive out of the Party in thousands, the very revolutionary elements without whom the Party could not possibly be built, the Left wing of the Party.

The general result of these long-continued reformist, non-revolutionary policies was to make it impossible to build the Socialist Party into a strong, revolutionary organization. The natural end-product of such a history is the present-day weak and stagnant Socialist Party.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A Generation of Reformism and Its Disastrous Effects

#### 1. THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S FAILURE TO ASSUME MASS LEADERSHIP

Now let us look briefly at the record of the Socialist Party and see concretely how it has persistently and flagrantly violated the two main essentials of the Marxian class struggle policy necessary for the building of a revolutionary party in the specific American conditions, namely, the development of the Party as the actual leader of the masses in the daily struggle and the cultivation of Marxian principles among the Party membership and mass following. We will take up the former essential first. Our summary of the Socialist Party's experiences in this connection makes no pretense at being a complete history of the Party. All it does is to indicate some of the main opportunist errors of the Party and the lessons to be drawn from them. The period covered extends from the foundation of the Party in 1901 down to the Socialist Party convention of 1934. As for the present tendencies of the Socialist Party, I shall discuss them in a later chapter.

##### *A. Passivity in Strikes and Other Struggles*

When the Socialist Party was formed the trade unions were already in the hands of the Gompers machine. The reactionary trade union leaders did not carry on a campaign to organize the mass of the unorganized, but instead confined their efforts chiefly to the narrow fringe of skilled workers. Many of these leaders were slothful, inefficient, self-seeking, corrupt, and tied up with all kinds of capitalist organizations. They were open defenders of the capitalist system, worked hand in glove with the two capitalist parties and generally acted as a brake upon the development of the workers' class struggle.

In such a situation it was manifestly the task and duty of the Socialist Party to do everything within its power to stimulate and give political leadership to the immediate struggles of the workers, particularly on the trade union field. This does not mean that the Socialist Party should have undertaken to take the place of the trade unions, but it should have sought to invigorate them, to extend their strikes, to strengthen their organization campaigns and generally to give practical leadership to their struggle, as against the reactionary policies of the Gompers machine.

This aggressive policy offered a high road to effective mass leadership by the Party. But such a course was alien to the nature and policies

of the Socialist Party petty-bourgeois leaders. They neither saw the historic task before the Party nor had the impulse to carry it out. They conceived the Party principally to be a propaganda organization, a movement to further their conceptions of public ownership and moderate legislative reform, as well as to conduct occasional election campaigns. They did not militantly lead the struggling workers.

Since its foundation, the Communist Party has shown how a party should give the lead to the trade unions and unorganized masses. Time and again it has mobilized its organizers and financial resources to support and strengthen trade union and other struggles. Many examples of this might be cited, such as the placing of some twenty paid organizers in the Pittsburgh area during the 1927 coal strike; the maintenance of many organizers during various Labor Party campaigns; the extensive organization crews built up during the big unemployment struggle of 1930-1933, the financing of various united front conferences, etc. But this active and leading organization work was practically unknown to the petty-bourgeois leaders of the Socialist Party. Where any such work was done it was almost always under the direct initiative of the Left wing. It is true that individual unions controlled by Socialists and also minorities of Socialists within various organizations outlined active organization campaigns and strike work, but this was largely spontaneous; the Party as a whole did not follow any such general policy. Its essential attitude was that of a bystander, commentator and educational force, rather than the militant, actual leader of the workers' daily struggle for their burning economic and political demands.

Illustrations of this Socialist Party passivity could be cited, if space permitted, from many important strike struggles, organization campaigns, etc., throughout the many years of the Party's existence. But the Socialist Party's attitude during the many great labor defense cases that came up from time to time serves to exemplify its non-militant relation towards the class struggle. In the Moyer, Haywood and Pettibone case in 1907, the Left wing of the Party gave active support, but the Right wing, instinctively sensing the militant revolutionist Haywood as an enemy, sabotaged the fight. In the McNamara case of 1911, the Socialist Party leaders, jointly with the American Federation of Labor, gave a certain support, until these brave fighters, badly advised, pleaded guilty in an effort to save the trade unions and their leaders from persecution. Whereupon the Socialist Party, like the American Federation of Labor, abandoned them completely and has never done a thing to help them since, although McNamara and Schmidt are still in jail after twenty-five years. In the Mooney-Billings and Sacco-Vanzetti cases of later years,



it was the Anarchists, Syndicalists, Communists and Farmer-Laborites who took the lead in the fight, with the Socialist Party trailing along in the rear. And in the recent Scottsboro case, it was the Communist Party that leaped quickly to the defense of the condemned nine Negro boys and by its swift action undoubtedly saved them from electrocution, while the Socialist Party only joined the struggle in the later stages, and then lamely and formally.

This traditional passive attitude of the Socialist Party towards the daily class struggle of the workers, the tendency to tail after the masses, to preach at them rather than to stand militantly at their head on every field of battle, cost the Socialist Party much possible mass support and leadership. It was one of the major reasons why the Socialist Party never succeeded in actually being accepted as the fighting party of the proletariat in this country.

### *B. Contradictory Industrial Union Policy*

One of the great mistakes also of the Socialist Party over many years was its opportunist handling of the vital question of industrial unionism. Even before 1900 the more progressive elements among the workers realized that the craft unions, because of specialization and trustification in industry, had become obsolete and that a system of industrial unionism was imperatively necessary. All sections of the revolutionary movement became impregnated with industrial union sentiment. With the issue of industrial unionism was bound up the whole question of the organization of the unorganized, honest leadership, militant policy, etc.

It was the historic task of the Socialist Party to give clear direction and active leadership to the industrial union movement, but it failed dismally in this obligation. It is true that the Party declared unequivocally for the principle of industrial unionism. But it never told the workers clearly how to bring about industrial unionism, nor did it give unified leadership to the movement. The Party was divided for fifteen years into two sections over this fundamental question. The Right wing worked mildly within the A. F. of L. for the principle of industrial organization through amalgamation, but always ready to make an opportunist maneuver on the question with the Gompers machine. On the other hand, the revolutionary Left wing of the Party, outraged by the corrupt regime in the A. F. of L., directed its efforts in the main towards the realization of industrial unionism through the incorrect policy of building dual unions, that is, industrial unions independent of the A.

F. of L. The outstanding example of such dual industrial unions was the Industrial Workers of the World, which was launched in 1905.

Manifestly, in this situation, it was the definite responsibility of the Party to liquidate by educational means and firm direction this glaring contradiction in policy within its ranks and to concentrate all Party forces upon a militant struggle within the trade unions for industrial unionism. But the petty-bourgeois Socialist Party leaders did not want an active fight for industrial unionism inside the A. F. of L., or outside either. They never wanted to fight the A. F. of L. leaders aggressively on basic issues. They were quite content to have the confused situation drag along as it was. So, over many years, they straddled the question, and the Right wing continued its opportunist line in the A. F. of L., while the Left wing frittered away its strength in dual unionism. The typical opportunist policy on this vital issue was expressed in 1912 when the Socialist Party convention endorsed the principle of industrial unionism but did not state whether this was to be brought to realization through the transformation of the old trade unions, or by the building up of the I.W.W. and similar dual industrial unions.

It was not until after the organization of the Communist Party in 1919, and especially under the influence of the writings of Lenin on the question of work within the old trade unions, that the revolutionary movement in the United States liquidated its traditional dual union tendencies and worked out a militant campaign in the A. F. of L. for industrial unionism, a campaign that eventually took organized shape in the Trade Union Educational League.

The general consequence of the Socialist Party's whole opportunist handling of the industrial union question vastly reduced the effectiveness of the Party's industrial union campaign in general. The work of one wing of the Party was antagonistic to that of the other, and because of this doubly wrong policy the Socialist Party as a whole lost its opportunity to secure real leadership of the masses on this fundamental question.

### *C. Anti-Labor Party Tendency*

Another disastrous error of the Socialist Party in pre-war days was its opposition in principle to the formation of the Labor Party. This was a mistake also shared in by the Left wing, for ultra-Left reasons. It is a well-known fact that in those countries where, because of specific national conditions, the trade unions were organized before the Socialist Parties took shape, the workers' first steps into independent political action were in the form of organizing labor parties based directly on the

trade unions. This was notably the case in Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand. The United States belonged to this category of countries. Here, because of factors already pointed out, the political development of the workers had been delayed ; but they had succeeded in building trade unions. The consequence was that when the workers began to feel the necessity for organized class political action their natural tendency was to do as the workers in Great Britain had done by developing a political organization, a Labor Party, directly out of the unions.

But the American Socialist Party leaders never understood this elementary fact. They resisted the natural trend of the workers to form a Labor Party. They tried mechanically to apply to the United States a policy which was adapted to Germany, Austria and old Russia, where the Socialist Party, either growing before or simultaneously with the trade unions, naturally became looked upon by the workers as the party of the working class. Thus, instead of helping the workers to take their first steps in political action through a mass Labor Party, the Socialist Party for many years sought to kill the Labor Party tendency by insisting upon the American workers accepting the Socialist Party as their mass party.

Instead of being its greatest champion as it should, the Socialist Party traditionally looked upon the Labor Party as a rival and fought against it. Harry W. Laidler said: "The formation of these parties [local labor parties – W.Z.F.] in various parts of the country brought a new competitor into the field against the Socialist Party."\* Robert Hunter, the S.P.'s early expert on the Labor Party, said the Socialist Party "is a Labor Party and all it needs is the united support of all American organizations". † He believed that to build a Labor Party apart from the Socialist Party would be "about as foolish a thing as to scrap the machinery of the A. F. of L. and to form a new trade union movement". ‡

It was only in 1921 when the Socialist Party, with but a handful of members and with its anti-Labor Party policy clearly bankrupt, finally had to yield to the inevitable and endorsed in principle the organization of a Labor Party. But it never became reconciled to this perspective. It refused to join with the Chicago Federation of Labor, the Communist Party and other Left organizations in 1923 in a real fight for the Labor Party. It has never made an active campaign for the Labor Party. Even

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\* Socialism in Thought and Action, p. 465.

† Labor in Politics, p. 179.

‡ Ibid.

today it is passive upon this whole question and still has the lingering feeling that the Labor Party is its rival.

The Socialist Party and the working class paid high for this long continued anti-Labor Party tendency. The Socialists' resistance to the naturally and spontaneously growing Labor Party definitely hindered the political development of the working class. It checked the growth of the Labor Party sentiment in the trade unions. It made it easier for the Gompers machine to keep the masses tied to the two old parties. Furthermore, with its wrong policy, the Socialist Party gave up perhaps the best weapon it ever had with which to fight the Gompers machine – the issue of the Labor Party. It was a sacrifice that the opportunist leaders could easily make, however, in their eagerness to be on good terms with the Gompers regime. The general consequence was that the Socialist Party badly failed to give leadership to the workers in the vital question of the development of their mass political consciousness and organization, and the Socialist Party itself as a result paid dearly in loss of potential membership and influence.

#### *D. Opportunist Trade Union Neutrality*

Another disastrous reformist tendency that prevailed all through the life of the Socialist Party down to the advent of the present new leadership was the so-called attitude of neutrality towards the trade unions. In substance this policy constituted a failure to put forward the Party policy militantly in the trade unions. It was a refusal to take up the cudgels for the necessary active fight against the corrupt Gompers-Green leadership to win the masses for Socialism. W. J. Ghent, expressing many Party decisions, defended this opportunist policy on the basis that the "Party does not seek to dictate to organized labor in matters of internal organization and policy".

It is clear that for Socialism to make headway in the working class, especially in the trade union movement, the Socialist Party had to come into head-on collision with the reactionary trade union leadership. It was not a question of dictation to the unions, but of positive assertion of the Party policy. But the doctors, lawyers, preachers, journalists, etc., who led the Socialist Party, wanted no such fight. In many instances in the trade unions, the Left Party elements, notably such men as Duncan McDonald of the Illinois miners, made a militant fight against Gompers. But this was not the true policy of the Party leadership. They wanted to cooperate with the Gompersites, not fight them. Such a struggle as that made later over many years by the Trade Union Educational League or such a determined stand as that now being taken by

John L. Lewis and the Committee for Industrial Organization against the trade union bureaucracy, was quite foreign to the whole conception of the opportunist S.P. leaders. They seldom got beyond the stage of shadow-boxing with the reactionaries.

In fact, the S.P. leaders' real tendency was to collaborate and amalgamate with the Gompers regime. If they did not actually consolidate their forces with the Green ruling bureaucracy sooner, it was primarily because of the pressure of the large and militant Left wing in the Party. However, after the big split in 1919 which took the whole Left wing out of the Party, the petty-bourgeois leadership, with no Left militants to restrain them, proceeded to drop all opposition to Gompers and to identify themselves almost completely with the reactionary ruling trade union clique. Says D. J. Saposs, dealing with this period:

"This new political alignment of the Socialists with the administration forces marks the end of their leadership in the opposition in the labor movement. They have abandoned the role of initiators of new issues for the labor movement. They are no longer the center of aggressive opposition.

"In its political activities, the Socialist Party has followed a course similar to that of the Socialist trade unionists. It has ceased attacking the conservative unions and leaders."\*

This traditional policy of the Socialist Party leadership to temporize and compromise with the reactionary American Federation of Labor officialdom was disastrous to the development of the Socialist Party as the real leading force in the labor movement. The only way the Socialist Party could have come forward as the vanguard of the working class was by a policy of sustained militant struggle on all fronts against the Gompers regime, and in this it failed dismally.

In summing up the general situation during the pre-war period, it can be safely said that if the Socialist Party had carried on a policy of class struggle, as indicated in the foregoing, it could have defeated the Gompers regime and given the trade union movement a Socialist leadership. In those days the Gompers machine was not so deeply entrenched, trade union democracy was much more prevalent, Red-baiting was not so effective (for the reactionaries then only deemed the revolution pretty much as an abstraction), and a well-directed fight could have upset the old leadership.

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\* Left Wing Trade Unionism, p. 39.

Even as it was, with all the wishy-washy opportunist policies of the Socialist Party, passivity in strikes, organization campaigns, Labor defense cases, etc.; its confused industrial union policy; its anti-Labor Party program; its weak fight against Gompers, etc., etc., – the Socialist forces made distinct headway in the unions. In 1912 they controlled such organizations as the brewery workers, bakery workers, shingle weavers, cap makers, painters, Western Federation of Miners, machinists, fur workers, journeymen tailors, ladies garment workers, coal miners, etc. They also controlled many central labor unions and large numbers of local unions, as well as strong minorities in the printers, cigar makers and almost every other labor organization. In the 1912 American Federation of Labor Convention, the Socialist candidate for President, Hayes, polled 5,073 votes against Gompers' 11,974. A determined policy on the part of the Socialist Party leadership would have soon carried the majority of the trade union movement. But such a policy was not applied. And to make matters worse, the petty-bourgeois leadership of the Socialist Party proceeded to smash completely the hopes of the Socialist forces winning the trade union leadership by driving thousands of the best proletarian elements out of the Party during the big Party split of 1912, of which I shall speak further along.

#### *E. Opportunist War Policy*

The World War presented a golden opportunity to the Socialist Party to develop its strength and mass leadership, but it fumbled the whole matter and failed to organize the masses effectively for anti-war struggle. There was undoubtedly a huge sentiment among the broad ranks of the people against America's entry into the war. This was demonstrated, among other things, by the election of Wilson on his anti-intervention program, and also by the total immediate failure of the volunteer system to recruit soldiers for the war. Not only did the situation offer a splendid opportunity for mass anti-war work, but this was also the central revolutionary task of the time.

But the reformist-led Socialist Party proved incapable of rising to the occasion. It did not develop a definite and well-organized mass struggle against the war. True enough, the Left wing, led by Debs and Ruthenberg, did succeed in putting the Party on record against the war and in developing considerable anti-war agitation, even though this was somewhat of a pacifist type and not yet a real Bolshevik anti-war policy aiming at transforming the war into a revolutionary struggle against capitalism.

The Right wing, however, took an equivocal position towards the war. Many of the petty-bourgeois leaders – Russell, Walling, Spargo, Simons, Stokes, Ghent, etc. – split away from the Party on a pro-war program. The rest dilly-dallied with the question and, in effect, sabotaged the Party's anti-war resolution. So that there was no real crystallization of the Party's forces to mobilize the masses against the war, no serious attempt to win the trade unions to an anti-war position, no organization of anti-war strikes, etc.

The general result was that, instead of making the huge gains that it should have made, the Socialist Party, because of its vacillating, opportunist policy on the war, only made a relatively moderate membership increase in the war years. And this advance was more than offset by a disastrous sharpening of the struggle between the Right and Left wings in the Party over the reformist leadership's opportunist war-time policies, and also by serious losses of position and control in the trade unions. During the war the Socialist Party paid heavily for its long years of wrong trade union policy. Because the Socialist Party had not entrenched itself in the unions in former times by a militant struggle based on sound principles, the Gompers clique was in firm command at the crucial moment and was able to use its official control with telling effect to swing the trade unions to a pro-war position. Thus it largely isolated the Socialist Party and crippled the whole anti-war struggle. The Socialist Party reformist leaders muffed the war situation almost completely. What should have resulted in a great victory of the Party they eventually turned into a serious defeat.

#### *F. Sabotaging the Russian Revolution*

A deadly, disastrous sin of the reformist petty-bourgeois leadership of the Socialist Party against the working class and the Socialist Party was its hostile attitude towards the Bolshevik Russian revolution. Perhaps nothing in the whole history of the Socialist Party did more to destroy that Party's internal unity, prevent its growth, and kill its mass influence than the bitter warfare that the professors, preachers, lawyers, and similar non-proletarian elements running the Socialist Party directed for many years against the Soviet government.

The advent of the October Revolution presented an unequalled opportunity for the Socialist Party to educate and organize the masses. Here, at last, was the much-dreamt-of, long-planned socialism come into being after a glorious victory over Russian tsarism and capitalism. The revolution taught a thousand vital lessons in proletarian theory, strategy and tactics; the heroism of its fighters was an inspiration to the

toiling masses of the world; it gave the first real ray of hope to the oppressed in all countries. What a tremendous opportunity for the Socialist Party to build itself by using this great world-shaking event for the furtherance of the Socialist cause in the United States! And together with this immense propaganda value of the Russian revolution to the Socialist Party there was also the duty-bound revolutionary task upon the shoulders of the Socialist Party to use all its power to organize the masses to defend the newly-formed Soviet government, attacked on all sides as it was by capitalist forces.

During all the years of its existence it has been one of the strongest factors in the growth of the Communist Party that it has fully understood the revolutionary significance of the Soviet government and thoroughly appreciated the opportunities and revolutionary duties connected therewith. But not so the Socialist Party. Its petty-bourgeois leaders were not revolutionists. They did not want to destroy capitalism, but to reform it. The Russian revolution was a thing alien and hostile to them. The overthrow of capitalism in Russia in October, 1917, was against their plan of gradually transforming society from capitalism to socialism. So, instead of supporting the Soviet government as all true revolutionists must, they viewed it with hatred and spared no words in denouncing it. And all this was in line with the antagonistic position assumed towards the Soviets by the Second International.

Throughout the life of the Russian revolution, the American Socialist press has reeked with anti-Soviet attacks, even though the Socialist Party has grudgingly endorsed the Soviet government because of mass pressure. Hillquit clearly expressed the general attitude of his co-middle class leaders when he declared, in a spirit of thorough hostility:

"The Soviet government has been the greatest disaster and calamity that has ever occurred to the Socialist movement. Let us dissociate ourselves from the Soviet government." \*

Every slander against the U.S.S.R. sent forth by bourgeois enemies was picked up, repeated and enlarged upon in the Socialist press. The Party leaders accused the Soviet government of "Red imperialism", of starving and oppressing the masses, of betraying the

Socialist cause. Norman Thomas, characteristically, added his voice to the deplorable anti-Soviet chorus when he said:

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\* New Leader, Feb. 4, 1928.



"One thing, however, is certain; the Russian government rules by tyranny and terror, with secret police, espionage and arbitrary executions." \*

Gompers, Woll and Green did not outdo the Socialist leaders in vicious anti-Soviet attacks. And as for Hearst, he copied many of his worst slanders from the columns of the Jewish Socialist *Forward*. The Socialist Party heroized the Menshevik counter-revolutionary Abramovich when he came to the United States, and the bourgeois world applauded the shameful spectacle of Hillquit, leader of the Socialist Party, acting as attorney for former Russian capitalist oil interests in the American courts in an effort to force the Soviet government to return their confiscated property.

Of all the non-revolutionary policies in the history of the Socialist Party petty-bourgeois leaders their anti-Soviet line was the worst and most destructive to the health, growth and mass leadership of the Socialist Party. It was the poison fruit of many years of reformism in all its putrid rottenness. It worked profoundly to undermine the integrity of the Socialist Party, to alienate from it the best fighting elements in the working class and to weaken its mass influence generally. This enmity towards the U.S.S.R. had a powerful effect in driving still deeper the wedge separating the Socialist and Communist Parties. Altogether it was a decisive factor in reducing the Socialist Party to the impotency which it has suffered in the past fifteen years. The anti-Soviet policy of the Socialist Party leaders was an aid and comfort to the capitalist enemies of the revolution, and it showed conclusively that these petty-bourgeois opportunists never could build the Socialist Party into a powerful revolutionary mass party.

### *G. Neck Deep in Class Collaboration*

After the World War the American big capitalists initiated their notorious movement for speeding up the workers. It was the period of the great rationalization of industry. New methods of driving the workers were introduced on all sides and the toilers' productivity swiftly increased. To secure some pretense of consent of the workers to the inhuman speed-up, all sorts of welfare systems, bonus plans, old age pensions, and the like were established. Besides this, illusions were intensively cultivated far and wide among the workers by Carver, Gillette, and many others to the effect that through the new-fangled employee

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\* As I See It, p. 93.

stock-ownership plans they were actually buying control of the industries and were on the highroad to some sort of collective - commonwealth. This speed-up movement raged nearly all through the Coolidge prosperity period, from about 1922 to 1929. It spread in the unorganized as well as organized industries. It vastly increased the exploitation of the workers and brought fresh billions into the coffers of the money-drunk capitalists.

The top A. F. of L. leaders, true to their reactionary role, fitted themselves into this whole speed-up program. They declared that strikes and the class struggle were obsolete and that the way of the workers to prosperity now lay through cooperation with the bosses to increase production - of which the workers were somehow to get an increased share. The A. F. of L. leaders adopted the whole speed-up system under the euphonious phrases of the "new wage plan" and the "higher strategy of labor". They hired efficiency engineers for the unions and set up the B. & O. plan and other forms of "union-management cooperation" to apply the bosses' speed-up. As a result of this monstrous class collaboration policy the A. F. of L. leaders reduced the unions to a semi-company union status, to mere appendages of the employers' production schemes. The workers' hard-won working conditions were ruthlessly sacrificed. In consequence, the unions declined steadily in membership and fighting spirit. For the first time in history they did not grow during a period of economic expansion. The whole trade union movement was afflicted with dry rot.

As befitted revolutionary organizations, the Communist Party and Trade Union Educational League fought uncompromisingly against this whole speed-up development. The Communists raised the question in every trade union. They denounced the B. & O. plan as disastrous to the trade unions and the interests of the workers; they exposed the many illusions that were being built up around employee-stockbuying, labor banking, etc.; they demanded a fighting, class struggle policy. And in making this fight the Communists had to face wholesale expulsion and discharge from industry and labor unions all over the country; for the combined employers and reactionary trade union leaders proceeded to extremes to break up all opposition to their class collaboration program. Never in the history of the American labor movement was trade union democracy at such a low ebb. The brave fight it made in these times was one of the best pages of the life of the Communist Party.

How did the Socialist Party meet its revolutionary duty in this critical situation, when the masses needed correct leadership so acutely? As

usual, it did not rise to the occasion. On the contrary, the Socialist trade union leaders everywhere identified themselves almost completely with the Green leadership. This was the period cited by Saposs above when the S.P. leaders ceased to be the trade union opposition. They became ardent supporters and theorizers of the "new wage policy" and the "higher strategy of labor". They condemned strikes as entirely out of date. In no industry did class collaboration reach greater heights than in the Socialist-controlled needle trades. And nowhere was the expulsion policy so ruthlessly applied against the militant Left-wing elements who were fighting to keep the trade unions from being used as tools to increase the exploitation of the working class.

The Socialist Party made no fight whatever against the infamous B. & O. plan, union management cooperation, the "new wage policy", and all the rest of it. This is not surprising, because the whole Second International had become greatly enthused over the speed-up movement, helped the bosses to introduce it in Europe, and hailed it as the broad way to socialism. Spinning fancy theories about an "organized capitalism", "super-imperialism", and a long period of peaceful capitalist expansion ahead, they outdid even the hectic American capitalist theorists of the rationalization of industry movement.

In 1925, when the Communist Party was fighting against union-management cooperation throughout the trade union movement, Norman Thomas, in his booklet, *What Is Industrial Democracy?*, gave his blessing to the notorious B. & O. speed-up plan in the following words:

"...the railroad management in return for improved standards of shop production is doing its utmost to keep the men supplied with work so that the men gain, not lose, by efficiency. The plan seems to be working well...."

The American Socialist Party naturally suffered severely from its tailing after the bourgeoisie in this situation. It became afflicted with the dry rot that had infected the trade union movement generally, except that the Socialist Party got it worse. The Party sank to the lowest stage in all its career, both ideologically and organizationally. By 1929 it had remaining only about 7,500 members, and its revolutionary spirit had dropped to correspondingly low levels. This was the generally unlovely period of the Party's support to LaFollette's candidacy, the removal of the class struggle clause from the Socialist Party membership application card, the agitation of Norman Thomas to change the name of the Party, etc. In short, the Socialist Party was on the very brink of

bankruptcy. The Party was harvesting in full the bitter crop of its many long years of opportunist petty-bourgeois leadership.

#### *H. Socialist Party Inertia in the Crisis*

When the great economic crash came in 1929 the employers, with the Hoover government their willing tool, proceeded to slash the wages of the employed and to force the millions of unemployed to starve. It is a notorious fact that the A. F. of L. leaders took no real action against this brutal course. On the contrary, they objectively aided the employers by viciously fighting against unemployment insurance and in support of Hoover's stagger system, and by signing the infamous Hoover no-strike-no-wage-cut agreement which enabled the bosses freely to slash wages. And for all this they were duly praised by the capitalist press.

The Communist Party, on the other hand, militantly took up the fight for the employed and unemployed workers. Beginning with the famous March 6, 1930, national demonstration of 1,250,000 unemployed, it carried on during the next three years a most aggressive struggle for and with the unemployed all over the country. It organized hundreds of local and state mass hunger marches and other demonstrations. It carried out several national conventions and marches on Washington. During these bitter fights the Communist Party and its following faced violent attacks from the police; hundreds were clubbed and jailed and many were killed in the demonstrations. The general effect of this big mass struggle under the Communist Party leadership was to make unemployment insurance and relief real issues in this country and to force many important relief concessions from the employers. It also laid a strong foundation for the Communist Party among the masses.

And what was the Socialist Party doing in these crucial early years of the crisis? Practically nothing to organize the unemployed masses for struggle. It was still paralyzed from its former orgy of class collaboration. While the Communist Party was on the firing line with huge demonstrations and other struggles, we find Norman Thomas and J. P. Morgan jointly supporting over the radio the useless block-aid system. The Socialist Party, it is true, talked a great deal in these years of unemployment relief and insurance, but it did not go out and fight for them. It was only after the Communist Party had long taken the lead in the struggle, and especially after new Left elements began to develop in the Socialist Party, that that Party slowly started to play a role in the struggle of the unemployed.

When the great strike movement began under Roosevelt's regime early in 1933, again the Socialist Party could not rise to the situation and give the awakening masses effective leadership. Manifestly, it was the task of every revolutionary organization to do all possible (as the Communist Party did) to stimulate and lead the employed workers in this the first real attack they had made against their oppressors for a dozen years. But the Socialist Party was incapable of giving such aggressive leadership. Instead, its leader Norman Thomas, who in 1932 had complained of the "docility of labor" and who was now filled with illusions about Roosevelt's "socialism", actually tried to put a damper on the struggle by telling the workers that "strikes are inadvisable at the present time".\* But the workers paid no attention to Thomas' opportunism, no more than they did to the similar advice of William Green; but went militantly ahead with the development of their enormous strike movement. Thus, once more, the Socialist Party, moved by reformist considerations, dilly-dallied with a crucial situation and failed to give the masses the necessary class struggle leadership.

#### *A Word in Summary*

In this section I have shown that historically the Socialist Party has consistently violated the first fundamental of the class struggle policy: namely, the necessity of coming forward aggressively as the champion of the masses in their daily fights for urgent economic and political demands. Instead of fulfilling this imperative necessity, the whole history of the Socialist Party is an abdication of such mass leadership. The illustrations cited: the Socialist Party's traditionally passive attitude towards strikes and organization campaigns; its long-continued contradictory industrial union policy; its anti-Labor Party tendency; its opportunist policy of neutrality towards the trade unions; its failure militantly to fight the Gompers-Green bureaucracy; its wavering policy during the war; its hostility to the Soviet government; its failure to fight the deadly union-management cooperation speed-up movement; and its lethargy in the struggles of the unemployed and employed workers during the early years of the present industrial crisis – all these wrong policies together amply prove the point that the Socialist Party has failed to give a fighting leadership to the toilers in their situations of deepest need. And to these illustrations others could be added as, for example, the Socialist Party's complete neglect of the burning Negro question over many

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\* New York Herald Tribune, August 8, 1933.

years, its opportunistic handling of the youth issue, its haphazard consideration of the problems of women, the foreign-born, etc.

The general result of the Socialist Party's traditional flabby, reformist, class-collaborationist policies, dictated by its opportunist middle class leadership, has been that the Socialist Party could not and did not become a strong, mass revolutionary Party. Its leaders ducked and evaded and compromised every struggle and issue that the workers were basically interested in. By its weak, opportunist course, the Socialist Party was unable to defeat its powerful capitalist enemies and their labor leader henchmen. Hence it did not secure the leadership of the masses and become their accepted revolutionary party. There could be no other outcome of the Socialist Party's long record of opportunist vacillations and abdication of leadership in the class struggle than the Party's present crisis and obvious failure.

## CHAPTER THREE

### A Generation of Reformism and Its Disastrous Effects (Continued)

#### 2. THE WAR AGAINST THE LEFT WING

In analyzing the basic reason for the historical failure of the Socialist Party – which was its lack of a Marxian policy of class struggle – let us now consider briefly the Socialist Party's experience with the second element going to make up such a policy of class struggle, *i.e.*, the necessity of laying a firm foundation for the Socialist Party by the cultivation of a strong body of revolutionary Marxian understanding in the Party membership and among its mass following. In doing this we shall see that the opportunist Socialist Party leaders have violated this fundamental no less deeply and consistently than they did the other imperative essential of a class struggle policy (which we have previously discussed), that of giving effective leadership to the masses in their daily struggles, and with equally disastrous results.

It was obviously an indispensable first condition for the success of the Socialist Party that it systematically educate the broadest possible ranks of Marxian revolutionists. Such revolutionists furnish the necessary understanding of the capitalist system, they are the tireless organizers of the masses, the bravest fighters in every crisis, the indefatigable builders of the Party, the heart and brain of the class struggle. To try to build a revolutionary Socialist Party without developing the Marxian understanding of its membership is to attempt the classically impossible task of making bricks without straw.

This would seem to be a pretty self-evident fact, but the Socialist Party has grossly ignored it throughout its existence. The Right wing petty-bourgeois intellectuals controlling the Socialist Party, instead of carefully cultivating the life-giving revolutionary tendency, looked upon it as a hostile force, and they spared no efforts to check it, to repress it, to extinguish it, indeed to burn it out of the Party. This action on their part was logical enough as they had no intention whatever of making the Socialist Party a revolutionary party. In this ruthless war against the Left wing, continued for a generation, is to be found a fundamental reason for the failure of the Socialist Party and for its present critical condition.

*The Two Wings of the Party*

Before describing this war against the Left wing it will be well briefly to analyze the Socialist Party groups. The Right wing, which dominated the Socialist Party from its organization down to the present year, was, during the heyday of the Party, made up of several groups. Chiefly these were:

A. The extreme Right, roughly, the Bernstein revisionist tendency, was composed of a miscellaneous group of lawyers, doctors, preachers, etc., such as Harriman, Berger, Cahan, Stokes, Wilson, Mills, Hoan, Laidler, *et al.* Previously, I have indicated the general reformist tendency of this group – government ownership, municipal socialism, parliamentary reform, anti class struggle, etc.

B. The agrarian group, also of extreme Right tendency, was strong in the farming districts of Oklahoma, Kansas, Texas, Washington, etc. It was a remnant from the breakup of the old Populist movement and it generally supported the line of the Right wing intellectuals, with the addition of its cheap-money vagaries and a particularly Utopian slant to its "Socialism". This tendency crystallized chiefly around such papers as Wayland's *Coming Nation*, *Appeal to Reason* and *Arkansas Ripsaw*.

C. The trade union group was composed of labor officials, like Van Lear and Johnston (Machinists), Walker, Germer and Hayes (Miners), Hayes (Printers), Barnes (Cigarmakers), Maurer (Plumbers), Skemp (Painters), Schiessinger (I.L.G.W.U.), etc. In general this opportunist group also followed the lead of the Right wing intellectuals, except that they placed more stress upon trade union questions.

D. The so-called center or Kautsky tendency was composed mainly of petty-bourgeois intellectuals. It included Hillquit, Simons, Oneal, Lee, etc. These people were sticklers for Marxian phrases if not for Marxian deeds. This group gave the Socialist Party its dominant leader for 34 years, Morris Hillquit.

Historically these four reformist groups functioned unitedly as the Right wing of the Socialist Party, especially in the war against the Left wing, and they had the backing chiefly of the non-proletarians and the skilled worker members of the Party. It is true that the Hillquit center group kept up a running quarrel for years with the raw opportunism of the extreme Right "post-office socialism" elements. But this fight was superficial and did not conflict with the basically reformist line of the Party. The only serious differences that developed within the broad Right wing were during the war when the pro-war Spargo, Stokes, Walling, *et al.*, quit the Party. After the national split of 1919 the four Right groups, or what was still left of them, gradually coalesced and



became practically indistinguishable from each other in one crassly opportunist old guard leadership.

The Left wing of the Socialist Party was more homogeneous than the Right wing. It was made up almost entirely of proletarians, chiefly unskilled and immigrant workers, with an occasional revolutionary intellectual. Through its twenty years of history within the Socialist Party it was led by such figures as Hagerty, Trautmann, Titus, Marcy, Haywood and Ruthenberg. Debs was usually a militant spokesman of the Left wing program, but he took no active part in shaping Party policy in conventions, etc. He never identified himself with the Left in its organized struggles against the Right, nor did he become involved in any of the various Party splits.

The Left wing took flat issue with the whole reformist line of the dominant Right wing intellectual leadership. Basing itself upon the fundamentals of Marx and Engels, it fought to give the Socialist Party a program and policy of revolutionary class struggle. It opposed the current opportunist theories of the peaceful taking over of the government and the plan of buying up the industries, and it placed in opposition to them the Marxian perspective of the overthrow of capitalism by open struggle and the expropriation of the expropriators without compensation. It condemned the Socialist Party leaders' passivity in the daily class struggle and their class collaboration policies and compromises with Gompersism. It demanded a program of active struggle against the employers and war to the knife against the capitalist-minded leaders of the trade unions.

Although the Left wing was the revolutionary element within the Party, it nevertheless suffered from many and serious theoretical and practical weaknesses, arising mainly out of its inexperience and ideological unripeness. These errors in general tended in the direction of "Left" sectarianism. They were largely a heritage from De Leonism, and were usually semi-Syndicalist in character. Among the more important of these Left wing errors were (1) Confusion regarding the nature of the revolutionary role of the Party, with tendencies to make the industrial unions the leading fighting force of the proletariat; (2) Wrong theories of the composition of the future dictatorship of the proletariat, with tendencies towards the Syndicalist trade union state; (3) Underestimation of the resistance power of capitalism and theories of accomplishing the revolution by the folded-arms general strike; (4) Underestimation of the struggle for immediate political demands and tendencies towards anti-parliamentarism; (5) Neglect of work within the mass trade unions and a Utopian belief in dual industrial unionism; (6) Un-

derestimation of the importance of the farming, Negro and lower petty-bourgeois masses as united front allies of the proletariat. Further sectarian tendencies were: against the Labor Party in principle; overstress upon the religious question, and the ignoring and flouting of American traditions and culture.

These various theoretical and practical errors of the Left wing worked greatly to hold back the progress of the Party. They tended to break its contacts with the masses and to push the Party into sectarian isolation. And, added to this, they handicapped the fight against the Right wing, for Right opportunism cannot be defeated with "Left" sectarianism. But the overwhelming responsibility for the failure of the Socialist Party is to be found in the rank opportunism of the dominant petty-bourgeois leadership, and not in the weakness of the Left. Despite its many errors the Left wing was basically correct in its striving for a class struggle policy. It was the healthy Party core, and only through the correction of its shortcomings and the development of its general program of class struggle was it possible to build the Socialist Party into a revolutionary party. It must be added, however, that the political line of the Right wing in no sense served to correct the errors of the Left wing. Its tendency was to drag the Party off in another direction, to the swamp of Right opportunism.

The long-continued struggle between the Right and Left wings, the highlights of which I shall now proceed to relate, placed the issue squarely: shall the Socialist Party be a party of petty-bourgeois reform or of proletarian class struggle? The cleavage was fundamental and the protracted fight took on the character of class struggle within the Party. So that during the various splits in many local branches the line of division passed almost exactly between the proletarians and non-proletarians, the working class elements going with the Left wing out of the Party. That the Socialist Party failed to become a revolutionary party is primarily an expression of the fact that the Left wing was defeated in its struggle for control of the Party and was compelled to build a new, revolutionary organization, the Communist Party.

### *Early Phases of the Inner-Party Struggle*

Hardly had the Socialist Party come into existence in 1901 as a result of the historically justified split away from the deadly sectarianism of the Socialist Labor Party than the fatal control of the reformist lawyers, doctors, preachers, journalists, etc., asserted itself. And, likewise, as the corrective to these baneful elements and tendencies, the revolutionary Left wing of the Party slowly began to take shape and to voice

its program. With the passage of the years the cleavage between the Right and Left wings of the Party became more pronounced, until finally the inevitable complete break came.

The first sharp division in the Party on a major scale occurred in 1905 over the question of industrial unionism which, then as now, was bound up with the whole question of militant trade union policies. The Left wing, repelled by the reactionary leadership and program of the A. F. of L., was for establishing new and independent revolutionary industrial unions, and the Right wing, opposed to fighting policies generally, was against it. Under the leadership of Debs, Haywood and De Leon (Socialist Labor Party) the Industrial Workers of the World was formed in Chicago in 1905. In his autobiography Haywood notes the division between Right and Left over the I.W.W. convention, stating that "None of the politicians of the Socialist Party, such as Berger, Hillquit, Spargo or Hayes, took part".\*

The factional struggle soon spread from the question of industrial unionism to many phases of the Party's theory and practice. The period in question was one of growing working class organization and class consciousness under the fierce pressure of expanding American capitalism. It was a time of many bitter strikes, of which the bloody Chicago teamsters' strike of 1905, with 21 killed and 451 wounded, was an example. Since 1898 the A. F. of L. had increased its membership from 270,000 to 1,550,000. The Socialist Party also reflected this rising tide of working class militancy, its membership increasing from some 12,000 in 1901 to 41,479 in 1909 and its influence rapidly growing in the trade unions.

The Left wing demand for a class struggle policy by the Party became stronger and stronger and new Left leaders developed. Increasingly the clash grew between the revolutionary elements and the petty-bourgeois leadership. The former wanted to make the Party into a real fighting instrument of the working class, the latter wanted to follow a policy of reformism and compromise. Tension was acute, especially in several states in the Far West, where the best organized and most revolutionary sections of the Party were located. The first serious split occurred in the Pacific Northwest early in 1909.

The split took place in Everett, Washington. The leader of the Lefts was Dr. H. T. Titus, editor of the *Seattle Socialist*, and the head of the Right wing was Dr. E. J. Brown, in later years Mayor of Seattle on a fusion ticket. The struggle centered around the question of reformist

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\* Bill Haywood's Book, p. 182.

petty-bourgeois domination of the Party, and against the suppression of the revolutionary elements and their program of struggle. The Left wing was supported mostly by lumber workers, city laborers and "stump" farmers; whereas the Right wing drew its support chiefly from the petty businessmen, intellectuals, skilled workers and farmers.

The Left wing had behind it a majority of the Party members, but when the convention assembled, the Right wing, which controlled the Party machinery, had managed to scare up a majority of the delegates. A split ensued and in consequence there were two Socialist Parties in the state. Whereupon, the opportunist-controlled National Executive Committee recognized the Right wing claims, excluding the Lefts, including myself, from the Party.

This blow of the Right wing Socialist Party leadership was characteristic of their growing war against the revolutionary element in the Party. Its consequence was, of course, seriously to injure the Party. Hundreds of the best members, not only in Washington, but also to a lesser extent in Oregon, Idaho, and California, were driven out of the Party and never returned to it. Most of them (like my- \*self) joined the I.W.W. and became Syndicalists. The whole affair was a criminal waste of good proletarian fighters, the real builders of the Party, by the reformist leadership. But this rupture was soon to be followed by another – also forced by the opportunist Socialist Party policies and leaders and far more disastrous to the Party – the big national split of 1912.

### *The 1912 Split*

In this period the working class was in a state of great foment. The trade unions were growing rapidly and conducting many bitterly-fought strikes. The I.W.W. was achieving a spectacular advance with the Lawrence textile strike and several other big struggles. The Socialist Party was growing rapidly and making fast headway in gaining leadership in the trade unions. It was also the time of the Roosevelt Bull Moose movement. All this militancy and struggle of the toiling masses emphasized the futility of the reformist policies of the Socialist Party leadership and stressed the need for a program of class struggle. But the opportunist leadership clung firmly to their reformist line. The struggle between the Right and Left wings of the Party quickly spread and sharpened.

The Left wing, grown strong in this period of mass awakening, had built a national movement around the *International Socialist Review*, published by the Kerr Co., and the chief figures of which were Bill Haywood and Mary Marcy. This center circulated the works of Marx

and Engels, routed revolutionary speakers, printed revolutionary pamphlets and developed the Left wing theory and practice on current events. Inevitably this Left center came into direct conflict with the National Office of the Socialist Party, which systematically played down revolutionary theory and agitation of every sort and poured out a flood of reformist propaganda.\* In consequence a struggle for organizational control of the Party developed, and the whole situation came to a climax in the May, 1912, Socialist Party convention.

The immediate program of the Left wing in this crucial fight centered around three major issues: against the opportunist petty-bourgeois control of the Party; for a policy of militant industrial unionism; and against the parliamentary opportunism and vote-catching policies of the leadership. The Left wing program at this stage was stated in Haywood's and Bohn's pamphlet, *Industrial Socialism*. This program contained many characteristic semi-syndicalist errors, such as underestimation of the role of the Party and of the importance of partial political demands, illusions about dual industrial unionism, etc., but the essence of it was the traditional and correct aim of the Left wing to give the Socialist Party a policy of class struggle.

The outcome of the convention was a major defeat for the Left wing, which was beaten on all its main questions. Firstly, it lost in the matter of displacing the opportunist leadership, because during the pre-convention elections so many petty-bourgeois elements got themselves elected as delegates that the convention was infested with and completely dominated by all sorts of careerist lawyers, journalists, doctors, etc. Secondly, it lost also on the question of industrial unionism; for although the convention indorsed industrial unionism in principle, it took no steps to put it into effect through correcting the opportunist practices of the Party leaders in the A. F. of L. and by liquidating the dual unionism of the Left wing.

But the Left wing suffered its decisive defeat on the general question of parliamentary opportunism. The Left wing's essential position

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\* The flock of Socialist Party Right wing intellectuals produced lots of books and pamphlets, but not one important Marxian work. The books of Myers, Russell and Sinclair, although full of valuable factual material, were but Socialist muckraking. Hillquit's books were only academic Marxism, and those of Simons and Oneal presented an opportunist conception of American history. Ghent and London, in their books, *Benevolent Feudalism* and *The Iron Heel*, produced notable works, but they also were saturated with opportunist conceptions.

was against the Party's being merely a vote-catching body, and wanted it to become a revolutionary propaganda organization and lead in developing broad mass struggles, especially on the economic field. But the Right wing was skillful enough to evade the main issue. It shifted the attack away from its own political opportunism and narrowed the fight down to an assault upon the Left wing's advocacy of sabotage. Sabotage at the time was very popular in the French Syndicalist movement and it had been taken up by the I.W.W. and the Left wing of the Socialist Party. It was the poorest possible issue for the Left wing to defend and the convention voted 190 to 91 against it, adopting the notorious Article II, Section 6, amendment to the Party constitution, which ran:

"Any member of the Party who opposes political action or advocates crime, sabotage or other methods of violence as a weapon of the working- class to aid in its emancipation shall be expelled from membership in the Party."

The basic meaning of all this ran far beyond the suppression of the advocacy of sabotage; it meant that the Party leadership had rejected the policy of class struggle and had turned still deeper into the reformism that was killing the Party. Its lawyer-doctor-preacher heads were determined to wipe out the revolutionary tendency in the Party and they followed up this convention victory by having Haywood recalled by referendum from the National Executive Council. Thus, Bill Haywood, the revolutionary fighter who was worth several carloads of the opportunist intellectuals who were running and ruining the Socialist Party, was not deemed worthy of sitting upon the Party's executive. The elimination of Haywood was a logical climax to the leadership's long and fatal war against the Left wing and its program of class struggle, the war that brought about the historic failure of the Socialist Party.

The outcome of the 1912 convention was a real disaster to the Socialist Party, one from which it never fully recovered. The deadly grip of the petty-bourgeois leadership was strengthened and their opportunist policies more deeply entrenched. A sort of silent split developed, thousands of the best proletarian members, Haywood among them, quitting the Party in disgust, never to return; many of them going to Syndicalism and the I.W.W. Thus the Party was drained of its best blood, and the loss of all these workers and basic Party builders soon showed itself in a real decline of the organization. The Party dropped in membership from 118,045 in 1912 (the highest point it ever reached in all its history) to 79,374 in 1915. Its national election vote fell from

897,011 in 1912 to 585,1 13 in 1916. And, of decisive importance, its previous rapid advance in the trade unions was stopped and the Socialist Party lost its opportunity to win the leadership of the A. F. of L. Reformism had dealt a mortal blow to the Socialist Party.

The 1912 split, however, could not be the decisive fight between the reformist and revolutionary forces in the Socialist Party. The Second International, which was not yet discredited by its betrayal in the World War and in the accompanying revolutionary struggles, still had great prestige as the revolutionary organization of the working class, as the Party of Marx and Engels. Hence its ultra-opportunist American section also retained the power to attract revolutionary workers. Moreover, the Socialist Party Left wing, still saturated with sectarian and Syndicalist tendencies, was as yet insufficiently developed ideologically to build a separate revolutionary party. So, with the great vitality and persistence which bespeaks the correctness of its revolutionary line, the Left wing, recovering from the disastrous 1912 defeat, began once more to build the Socialist Party and to organize its forces and program within it. But the opportunism of the Socialist Party leadership was soon to cause a complete break between the reformist Right and the revolutionary Left and to call into being the Communist Party.

### *The 1919 Split*

The 1919 split in the American Socialist Party was part of the world-wide break between the reformist and revolutionary elements in the Second International, the split that gave birth to the Communist International. It was the inevitable culmination of the growing antagonism for years past between the revolutionists and the opportunists in the world Socialist movement. It was directly caused by the Second International's support of the World War, by its antagonism to the Russian revolution, and by its betrayal of the revolutionary struggles of the workers in Germany, Hungary and other European countries at the close of the war.

These great world events, of course, had profound repercussions in the American Socialist Party. They brought to the breaking point the long-developing tension between the Right and Left wings of the Party and made it impossible for the mutually antagonistic reformist and revolutionary elements to live within the one political organization.

In the vital question of the war, as we have seen, the Left wing of the American Socialist Party had energetically opposed the whole war-time course of the Second International, condemned the action of its parties which supported the war, and strongly resisted America's entry

into and prosecution of the war. But the Right wing leaders of the Party, under cover of radical phrases, compromised with the war situation in a typical reformist manner. This brought to an acute stage the struggle between the two groups.

The controversy within the Party over the Russian revolution also added fuel to the spreading conflagration. The rapidly growing Left wing heartily supported the revolution and accepted its great revolutionary lessons, including the fundamental principles laid down by Lenin. But the Right wing hated the Russian revolution as the very victory symbol of the revolutionary spirit which they had fought against for so many years in the American Socialist Party. They rejected Lenin's teachings and placed the works of this greatest revolutionist since Marx upon the banned books list, where they still remain until this day. All of which deeply embittered the Left wing.

The growing struggle between the Right and Left wings of the Party was further spread and intensified by Social-Democracy's betrayal of the German revolution at the end of the war through the liquidation of the Soviets set up by the workers, soldiers and sailors. This treacherous action, which saved capitalism throughout central Europe and to which the present-day Hitler can trace his power, met with the approval of the American Right wing and the bitter hostility of the Left.

Thus, in this series of great events the Socialist Party, in the United States as well as abroad, was hopelessly split ideologically by the reactionary course of its opportunist leaders. The long years of struggle within the American Socialist Party, as in other countries, had come to a climax. The two wings of the Party were at open war with each other. It was the parting of the ways between the two conflicting tendencies within the Party; between the policies of class struggle and class collaboration; between the revolutionists who were determined to overthrow capitalism and the opportunists who wanted to reform it.

Inevitably the deep ideological split also took on organizational form. And logically it was the Right wing, in line with its long struggle to kill the revolutionary tendency, that took the actual initiative in splitting the Party. Briefly, the break developed thus: The revolutionists, led by C. E. Ruthenberg and organized first in the Socialist Propaganda League (Boston, 1915) and later in the Left wing of the Socialist Party (New York, June, 1919), had the support of the majority of the Party membership and in 1919 they elected 12 out of 15 members of the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party. But the Right wing, which controlled the Party apparatus, repudiated this election and, in order to dominate the approaching Emergency Convention, suspended



several language federations and the whole Michigan State Party organization (much as the A. F. of L. Executive Council lately ousted the C.I.O.). At the convention itself in Chicago, August 30, 1919, the Rights, with the help of the police, expelled all known Left wing delegates.

The split was thus completed. At last the Right wing had succeeded in its historic aim of getting rid of the revolutionary element from the Socialist Party. But the ruinous consequences to the Socialist Party of this criminal expulsion of the Party's best forces, its very life blood, were not long in showing themselves. The 1919 split turned out to be even more disastrous to the Socialist Party than that of 1912. Within a year the Party's membership dropped from 104,- 822 to 26,766\* and by 1927 it had fallen to but 7,425. The influence of the Party in the trade unions declined swiftly, and its vote in the Presidential elections of 1928 (262,805) was hardly more than 25 per cent of its vote in 1920. Socialist representation in state and local legislative bodies fell to but a small fraction of its former strength. The Party went generally into decay, and its once extensive press was almost wiped out. Its opportunist leaders, with the Left wing no longer on hand to restrain them, completely abandoned all fight against the A. F. of L. reactionaries and joined with them in their whole program of B. & O. plan speed-up, labor banking, expulsion of Communists, anti-Soviet slander, etc. Thus, reduced almost to zero in numbers, influence and revolutionary principle, the bankrupt Socialist Party drank to the dregs the bitter cup of its opportunist petty-bourgeois leadership, with their fatal reformist policies and relentless war against the Left wing.

### *The Communist Party*

In consequence of the 1919 split the flag of socialism passed from the hands of the Socialist Party. By twenty years of opportunism and failure the Socialist Party petty-bourgeois leaders had shown that they would make no fight for revolutionary socialism. A new Socialist standard bearer, a revolutionary party, was necessary and it was formed, the Communist Party.

In previous splits – 1909, 1912 – the expelled Left wing because of its ideological undevelopment had either liquidated itself into I.W.W. Syndicalism or dribbled back individually to the Socialist Party. But

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\* In the summer of 1921, the last detachment of the Left wing, the Workers Council group (Engdahl, Trachtenberg, Finnish Federation, etc.) also quit the Socialist Party.

not so in 1919. The revolutionaries, acquainted now with the principles of Leninism and educated by the great events of the war and the post-war revolutions, had matured theoretically. By 1919 the Left wing had cleared up, or was rapidly doing so, its traditional semi-Syndicalist errors on such questions as the role of the state, the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the seizure of power, the role of the Party and the trade unions, etc. In short, as Alex Bittelman says, it had advanced "from vague Left Socialism and general proletarian militancy to the definite and solid foundations of Leninism".\* Hence, on August 31 and September 1, 1919, in Chicago, the split-off Left wing of the Socialist Party organized itself into two Communist Parties. Between these, however, there was little difference in principle; so, finally, two years later, they fused into one united Communist Party.

Here is not the place for a history of the Communist Party. The student can find this in Bittelman's *Fifteen Years of the Communist Party*, Browder's *Communism in the United States* and *What Is Communism?*, Bimba's *History of the American Working Class* and my forthcoming book *From Bryan to Stalin*. In this study of the Socialist Party I cannot give even an outline of the Communist Party's development and policy.

Suffice it to say that the Communist Party has based itself firmly upon the class struggle policy which the Socialist Party throughout its history rejected. It has come forward energetically in the measure of its strength as the leader of the masses in their daily fights against the capitalist exploiters, and it has systematically cultivated revolutionary Marxism-Leninism among its own membership and mass following. And the general result of this correct policy of class struggle is the present unity, growth and expanding influence of the Communist Party.

As was to be expected, the development of the revolutionary Party in the greatest stronghold of capitalism was no bed of roses. On the one hand, there had to be overcome, with the help of the Communist International, the harmful semi-Syndicalist sectarian conceptions inherited by the Left wing from the past, and this was not accomplished and a revolutionary program developed without sharp internal struggles and many serious errors in the practical work of the Party. And, on the other hand, there had to be withstood the fierce attacks of the capitalists and their agents, including severe governmental persecution, widespread expulsion from the trade unions and industry by reactionary union officials working with the bosses, etc.

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\* *Fifteen Years of the Communist Party*.

But the Communist Party has prospered in spite of all these difficulties. It is now unified and healthy, and its membership and influence are constantly increasing. The Party's recent membership figures show: 1930 - 7,500; 1931 - 9,000; 1932 - 14,000; 1933 - 18,000; 1934 - 26,000; 1935 - 30,000; 1936 - 41,000, plus 1 1,000 members in the Young Communist League or 52,000 in all.

Wherever the fight is hottest there the Communist Party is to be found organizing the toilers for a united front stand against the exploiters. Not to mention its many big struggles of past years, including the long fight for amalgamation and the Labor Party; the fight against the B. & O. plan; the long struggle against corruption and gangsterism in the unions; the big 1930-33 fights of the unemployed; the many strike struggles of 1933-35, notably the San Francisco strike, etc. The Communist Party, with its broad united front policy, is playing an active role on every front in the class struggle.

Here I can mention only a few of the Communist Party's chief current activities: At the present time it has mobilized the support of at least 5,000,000 workers and others in support of the Workers Unemployment Insurance Bill (H.R. 2827). It is playing an important part in the American Youth Congress, which at its convention in Cleveland, July 3, 1936, had 1,400 delegates representing a membership of 1,700,000. The Communist Party is likewise a vital factor in the American League Against War and Fascism, a movement which held its Third Congress in Cleveland in January, 1936, with an attendance of 2,070 delegates from 1,840 organizations of 3,291,906 members. The Party's role was also one of significant importance in the organization of the great united front National Negro Congress in Chicago, February, 1936, of 1,817 delegates representing 1,200,000 members organized in trade unions, churches, youth clubs, etc. In all these united front movements the Communist Party is an official participant. It is also taking an active part in the present big drive of the C.I.O. to organize the steel, auto, rubber, and other mass production industries. In addition, the Party is active in developing the Farmer-Labor Party movement. This was acknowledged when, at the May 30, 1936, Farmer-Labor conference in Chicago, attended by prominent leaders of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, many local labor parties, etc., the Communist Party delegates were officially seated.

A most important present activity of the Communist Party and an evidence of its growing mass influence is its militant fight against the suspension of the C.I.O. unions by the A. F. of L. Executive Council.

Up to the present writing 20 state federations, 70 central bodies, several international unions and hundreds of locals have protested the suspension. The masses of trade unionists are enraged at the attempt of Green, Hutcheson and Co. to split the labor movement, and the Communist Party has been very active in crystallizing this mass resentment into concrete action. The C.I.O. to date has bestirred itself very little in organizing this protest, and as for the Socialist Party, prostrated by its hesitant attitude and internal chaos, it has made virtually no fight whatsoever to preserve the unity of the trade union movement.

The growth and accomplishments of the Communist Party are, of course, very modest in comparison with the great revolutionary tasks ahead. The Party also still has many weaknesses and insufficiencies that have to be corrected. But the important thing is that the Party is on the right track, its fundamental program of class struggle is correct, its policies of the broad united front are successful, and it is learning to apply them effectively. This is amply proven by the revolutionary Communist Party's record of growth and progress, in comparison with the historical failure of the reformist Socialist Party. The Communist Party is becoming a major political factor in the country, while the Socialist Party flounders along in crisis and decline. All of which goes to show that in the many long years' fight between Rights and Lefts in the American revolutionary movement, the Lefts were profoundly correct. Not along the road of reformism, but of class struggle is the way the workers have to go to achieve socialism.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Present Situation in the Socialist Party

#### *The Turn to the Left*

As we have seen, the present crisis in the Socialist Party is not a matter of recent development. It is the piled-up result of long years of wrong policy, of Right opportunism, of flagrant violation of the Marxian class struggle policy which was fundamentally necessary to build the Socialist Party. But in the last three years there has been something of a change in the Socialist Party's traditional trend. That Party has shown fresh Left tendencies, and with them some signs of renewed growth and activity.

Among the more marked of these tendencies were an overhauling of the Socialist Party's theoretical line, which resulted in the adoption of a more Left statement of principles at the Detroit, 1934, convention; greater mass activity in the daily class struggle, especially among the unemployed; a growing tendency towards united front movements with the Communist Party; a growth of the Party's membership from 10,389 in 1931 to 19,121 in 1935; an increase in the national election vote to 883,341 in 1932, as against 262,805 in 1928; the defeat of the "Old Guard" as the Party leadership, and the split with these elements at the Cleveland 1936 national Party convention.

A number of forces combined to bring about the new Left tendencies in the Socialist Party. The most decisive of these was the great radicalization of the proletariat during the past few years – marked by the many big struggles of the unemployed, the huge strike wave, the expansion of the unions, the growth of Labor Party sentiment, the formation of the C.I.O., the widely spreading mass discontent with capitalism as a system, etc. This basic mass radicalization movement naturally had its effect upon the Socialist Party by forcing it, especially from the pressure of its new proletarian members, into activity and into a more Left position. Another very important factor in the Socialist Party's reawakening was the shameful surrender of German Social-Democracy in face of the rise of Hitler. This development, followed soon afterward by the victory of fascism in Austria, exposed the utter bankruptcy of social reformism and stimulated the Left tendency, not only in the American Socialist Party but also in many other parties of the Second International. Another basic factor greatly encouraging Left developments in the Socialist Party was the continued success of the Soviet Union. The victorious Soviet government, the fruit of Communist policy, stands out in glaring contrast with the great defeat of the whole line

of the Socialist reformists and consequently has a revolutionizing effect upon the proletarian members of the Socialist Party. The growth of the popular front movement in Spain and France in the past two years had a similar result. And, finally, the growth of the American Communist Party, in contrast with the crippled Socialist Party, has a big influence in developing Left sentiment among the Socialist Party working class members.

The Communist Party welcomes the new Left tendencies in the Socialist Party for the good and obvious reason that every increase in revolutionary sentiment and organization is fundamentally advantageous to the working class and hence also to the Communist Party. And in supporting the new Left trends in the Socialist Party a central task is to analyze and evaluate them. The question before us here is to learn whether in its new orientation the Socialist Party has succeeded in overcoming the ruinous reformist policies which it pursued for a full generation and which have reduced it to its present critical position.

#### *The Socialist Party's Petty-Bourgeois Leadership*

First let us consider the question of leadership. In previous pages I have pointed out what a disaster it was for the Socialist Party to have been dominated from the outset by a petty-bourgeois leadership of lawyers, preachers, doctors, etc. They were the chief source of the opportunism that hamstrung the Party throughout the years. What has happened to the Socialist Party then in this respect in its new Left turn?

Here we get an unfavorable answer. The situation remains substantially as 'before. True, a raft of these petty-bourgeois reformists quit the Party in the 1936 Right wing split, formed the People's Party and are now waging war against the Socialist Party. There are new, young leaders developing in the Socialist Party, but still the Party is heavily dominated by non-proletarian elements. This was manifested at the Cleveland convention, with its many preachers, lawyers, etc., and it is also expressed by the petty-bourgeois make-up of the Socialist Party National Executive Committee. Of the eleven members in this committee four are lawyers, four are preachers and two professors; only one is proletarian, and he is a trade union official. Compare this Socialist Party non-working class leadership with the Political Committee of the Communist Party which is composed of 11 members, all proletarians.\*

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\* The Socialist Party National Executive Committee is still more unrepresentative in that it contains no Negro, women or youth members; whereas in the Communist Party top committees these elements are fully represented.

The Communist Party is not in principle against the membership of middle class intellectuals. Such intellectuals, when they are revolutionary, have a great contribution to make to the working class movement. This was brilliantly demonstrated by the life work of Marx, Engels, Lenin and many others. But not by the type of opportunist intellectuals that have always shaped the policies of the American Socialist Party. Throughout its entire history these petty-bourgeois reformists have been a barrier in the way of the Socialist Party's developing a healthy class struggle policy and, despite the new Left trends, that barrier still exists. The proletarianization of the leadership of the Socialist Party is a fundamental necessity in order for that organization to develop towards a strong and revolutionary party.

Next we turn to the question of policy. I shall state the question concretely: In previous chapters I have pointed out in considerable detail, how the inability of the Socialist Party to build itself into a strong revolutionary party during its long history must be ascribed to its failure to carry out a Marxian class struggle policy, that is, (a) its failure to come forward aggressively as the mass leader of the working class in its struggles for everyday economic and political demands; (b) its failure to educate and develop a solid body of trained Marxian revolutionaries as the backbone of the Party. Now let us see whether or not the Socialist Party, with its recent Left turn, has liquidated these two fatal reformist weaknesses or shows indications of doing so.

### 1. THE QUESTION OF THE DAILY MASS STRUGGLES

The answer to this question must be negative. The Socialist Party's new line, especially in its latest developments, does not make for increasing its leadership of the masses in their daily economic and political struggles. Throughout the history of the Socialist Party prior to 1934, as we have seen, the openly Right wing reformist policy of the Party, the tendency for the opportunist petty-bourgeois leaders to soft-pedal and compromise all struggles of the workers, was the obstacle that prevented the Socialist Party from becoming the daily mass leader of the proletariat. The Party has not, despite its new turn, been able to free itself of this traditional reformism. It has only succeeded in adding new forms to its reformist line.

These new forms of reformism consist of a tendency towards sectarianism. The sectarian tendency dresses itself up with many revolutionary phrases, but it is opportunistic just the same. And it is no less fatal to effective mass work than open Right opportunism. It has been especially manifest in the past year and has already done the Socialist

Party much harm. Unless it is speedily corrected it will have deadly effects upon the Socialist Party by still further isolating it from the life and struggles of the masses.

#### *A. The New Socialist Party Sectarian Reformism*

There is at present great theoretical confusion in the Socialist Party, what with groups of "Old Guard" reformists, Thomasites, Hoanites, "militants", Trotskyites, Lovestoneites, and a minority of developing Leninists all advocating their respective policies and struggling for control of the Party, while the split-off "Old Guard" makes war from the outside. The dominant voice in the inner-party chaos is that of Norman Thomas. He is the outstanding theoretical leader of the Party and he is especially active in injecting the new elements of sectarianism into the general reformist line of the Party. His program boils down to a curious combination of Right and "Left" sectarianism superimposed upon a basic structure of the old discredited class collaboration of the Second International.

It is not surprising that there should develop sectarian tendencies of revolutionary phrase-mongering among the Socialist Party membership. Unquestionably, the proletarian members of the Socialist Party in their new Left mood want to make a revolutionary organization of their Party, but with no solid Marxian training as a background, they drift off into mere revolutionary phrase-making instead of making a sound revolutionary policy. It is what Lenin called the infantile sickness of "Leftism". This tendency is worsened by the petty-bourgeois opportunist leadership of the Party which systematically diverts the workers' revolutionary moods into mere radical phrase-making and thus avoids real mass struggle. They continue their opportunist line in a different form.

At first glance it may seem astonishing that a pronounced advocate of the new sectarian tendency should be Norman Thomas, who hitherto has always been an open Right opportunist. But such "Left" vagaries are not uncommon on the part of Socialist middle-class intellectuals all over the world. I need only refer to the case of the ultra-opportunist C. E. Russell joining with Debs in warning against opportunism in the Socialist Party in their pamphlet *Danger A head*, or the case of the reformist Frank Bohn lining up with Bill Haywood in the 1912 inner-party fight, or the recent instance of A. J. Muste, who in a few years completed the cycle of preacher – progressive trade unionist – Left Socialist – Trotskyite and then back to preacher again. Right opportunists can easily fly over to "Left" sectarian positions.



The sectarian danger in the Socialist Party was greatly increased by that Party's recent absorption of the Trotskyite group. Just at the time when these counter-revolutionary elements were being proved to be terrorists and assassins the Socialist Party saw fit to take them to its bosom. But it will inevitably pay dearly for this mistake in loss of strength and influence. The Trotskyites, who are finding easy pickings in the confused, chaotic Socialist Party, are tending greatly to turn that organization into an anti-Communist, anti-Soviet sect. This will drive the best worker elements out of the Socialist Party and will further weaken its contacts with the masses. Not long since the French Socialist Party also made the mistake of swallowing the noisome Trotsky group, but it soon had to relieve itself of the poisonous, indigestible mess, and the American Socialist Party will have to do the same if it is to develop into a healthy party.

### *B. Underestimation of Immediate Demands*

Now let us look at the practical application of the Socialist Party's new mixture of sectarianism and Right reformism, of which Thomas is the great champion. The heart of Thomas' theorizing is to the effect that inasmuch as capitalism is now breaking down the fight for partial economic and political demands is relatively unimportant and that the immediate issue upon which all attention should be concentrated is the basic revolutionary question of socialism versus capitalism. His position, in substance, is that the workers cannot satisfy their most immediate needs or protect their most elementary rights short of establishing a socialist society. Thomas says, "The immediate demand of the Socialists is socialism."\*

Now all this sounds very revolutionary, especially coming from Norman Thomas who only three years ago was enthused over the "steps toward socialism" of Roosevelt. But actually it is only radical phrase-mongering. Its general effect is to weaken the struggle of the workers and to play into the hands of the bosses. Its continuance will make havoc with what membership and standing the Socialist Party still has left.

Thomas' playing down of immediate partial demands goes counter to the whole need and trend of the revolutionary movement. His line is one of mere agitation, not struggle. The fight for partial demands is the starting point for all revolutionary struggle. And never did they play such a vital role as they do now, with the workers' civic, working, and

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\* Radio speech, Oct. 20, 1936.

living standards being so viciously attacked by the growing fascist reaction. As the Communist Party correctly stresses, a militant defense of the workers' immediate interests is the first condition for the development of the struggle against capitalism as a system. It is only in such fights that the workers can develop the necessary understanding, confidence and organization. When Thomas puts out his slogan, "If reform is the way out, better stick with the Roosevelt administration", and then backs this up by soft-pedaling the fight for the immediate issues confronting the toiling masses and by concentrating upon mere agitation for the establishment of socialism, he abandons the present-day fighting field of the revolutionary movement and reduces the whole struggle for socialism to an empty abstraction. He not only undermines the present-day fight of the workers but the ultimate aims of the working class as well. In the name of socialism he hampers the fight for socialism. And the effect of it all upon the Socialist Party is still further to isolate it from the life and struggles of the masses and thus to push it along the fatal road of sectarianism. It is also water on the mill of the counter-revolutionary Trotskyites who are struggling to control the Socialist Party.

### *C. The Retreat Before Fascism*

Consequent upon his failure to perceive the fundamental importance of the fight for immediate demands in the development of the revolutionary struggle in general, Thomas abandons the field in the face of advancing fascism. With his constant harping upon the one string of "socialism versus capitalism" he quits the real revolutionary battle which, in its present preliminary stages, is now being waged around the central question of "democracy versus fascism". Is this not as clear as day in France and Spain? There the workers and their allies, who in their overwhelming mass would remain unresponsive to sterile and academic talk such as Thomas' about establishing socialism forthwith, are nevertheless drawn into revolutionary activity by their fight against the attacks of the fascists upon their present civic, working, and living standards. Their movement begins as a defensive fight for the most elementary immediate needs, their wages, their right to organize, the national independence of their countries, etc., but it soon passes over to a counter-offensive struggle for major objectives making definitely towards a revolutionary clash with capitalism.

Thus in France the workers and their allies were not content simply with setting up the Blum government as a defense against fascism but carried their counter-offensive much further, adding 3,000,000 new

members to the trade unions, securing wage increases, shorter hours, vacations with pay, etc., etc. And in Spain this whole revolutionary trend is even more marked. Who can doubt but that the masses in these countries, starting from their defense of their democratic rights and developing their counter-offensive, have made huge strides in the direction of the final struggle for socialism? And the same general rule applies to the United States. When Thomas does not see the question of progress versus reaction, of democracy versus fascism, as the issue of immediate struggle, he fails to see the present-day revolutionary struggle in general and he lives in a realm of reformist sectarian abstractions.

Where Thomas' blindness on the issue of democracy versus fascism leads to in actual practice is shown by the tragically ridiculous position of the Socialist Party in the 1936 Presidential election campaign, which is still going on as I write this. The situation is that the Liberty League and other great capitalist interests, which embody the real threat of fascism and of which such figures as Coughlin, Smith, Talmadge, etc., are satellites, are bitterly opposed to Roosevelt's concessions to the toiling masses, meager though they were, and they are almost solidly behind Landon. Roosevelt has served them well. His proudest boast is that he saved the capitalist system by the New Deal. But the big exploiters are determined to find an even more convenient instrument for putting across their ultra-reactionary program, a program which inevitably leads in the direction of fascism.

It is clear that the Republican candidate Landon, with his false-face of liberalism and his tutelage by the fascist Hearst, is the spokesman of the main fascist danger in this country. Although he himself is not definitely a fascist and while his victory would not result immediately in the establishment of fascism, it would, nevertheless, undoubtedly stimulate enormously the employers' reactionary offensive and greatly facilitate the growth of fascist tendencies. In line with the realities of the situation, therefore, the Communist Party has correctly singled out Landon as the chief expression of the fascist menace and urges his defeat. But this by no means implies endorsement of Roosevelt. On the contrary, the Communist Party points out that with his constant service to reactionary finance capital Roosevelt is an ardent defender of capitalism and is no barrier to fascism. It advocates the formation of a united front anti-fascist Farmer-Labor Party and, in the absence of such a party, in the present elections, it calls upon the masses to vote for the Communist Party candidates, Browder and Ford.

But Thomas can see no fascist danger in Landon. Quite the reverse: he concentrates his main fire against Roosevelt and gives direct support

to Hearst's man, Landon. The fascist-like election strategy of the Republican Party and its heavy financial backers is, through the candidacy of Landon, to put something of a liberal face upon their reactionary program and thus to delude the masses. But Thomas, instead of joining with the Communists, trade unionists, liberals, etc., in exposing this dangerous demagogic trick, proceeds to give it practical support.

Thomas aids the capitalist demagogy by absolving Landon of any taint of fascism and accepting this pseudo-liberalism at its face value. He assails the Communists for ascribing a fascist tendency to Landon and he can see the trend towards fascism only in such figures as Coughlin, Smith, etc. Says Thomas, "The fascist demagogue will talk like Huey Long or maybe like Lemke, but not like Landon or Knox".\* This attitude constitutes direct aid to the fascist Hearst's candidate, as it tends to disarm the masses and lure them into the demagogic trap set for them by fascist-minded big capital.†

Hut Thomas goes further than this. He also undertakes to cleanse Landon's big financial supporters themselves of any suspicion of fascism. This he does with doubly fallacious argument. Firstly, he presents the deadly reformist illusion that fascism is a movement of the middle class,‡ instead of its being basically the movement of finance capital, with the middle class serving as its tool; and secondly, he makes the ridiculous assertion that the Republican Party, the party of monopoly capital, instead of tending on towards fascism and further monopolization, is actually trying to turn back the wheels of time and return to the period of relatively free competition, to the individualistic capitalism of the nineteenth century. He declares, "Landon, or the forces and interests behind him which are stronger than Landon, are in the strict sense of the word reactionary. They want to go back to an older capitalism".§ Thus, Thomas would have the workers believe that finance capital pre-

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\* Quoted in Daily Worker, July 13, 1936.

† Thomas' acceptance of Landon's demagogic pretenses of liberalism was evidenced by his much publicized letter to Landon asking him to state more precisely his position towards labor. For this service to Landon, Thomas was heartily praised by Hearst and the whole Republican press and roundly condemned by many spokesmen of labor.

‡ "The essential thing about fascism in Europe is that it is a middle class movement, directed nominally as much against international bankers or plutocrats as against organized workers." *After the New Deal - What?* p. 144.

§ *Socialist Call*, Sept. 12, 1936.

sents no real menace of fascism, but is actually a barrier against it.

Consequent upon this absurd analysis, Thomas arrives at the conclusion that it makes no difference whether Roosevelt or Landon is elected. But in reality the weight of his argument favors Landon, and gives him direct support. Indeed, Thomas finds a characteristically ridiculous reason for the election of Landon when he says: "Conceivably a Landon victory might put iron in labor's blood."\* When Hearst, to elect Landon through a Red scare, lyingly alleged that the Communists were supporting Roosevelt, Thomas at once rushed into print and seconded Hearst's charge. Small wonder then that Hearst, the chief American fascist, should quote him approvingly in his great chain of papers. And it is significant that with the Republicans in the election campaign fiercely denouncing not only Browder, but also such people as Frankfurter, Tugwell, Ickes, Wallace, Lewis, Hillman, Dubinsky, and even Roosevelt himself, as dangerous Communists, they exempted Norman Thomas entirely from their attack. In Mineola, New York, the Republican city authorities refused a public building for a meeting of the American Labor Party (to which 450,000 New York trade unionists are affiliated) on the ground that it was Communistic, but they freely allowed the use of the hall the following night to the Socialist Party, with Norman Thomas as speaker.

The 1936 national elections constitute the sharpest class divisions in American history. On the one side, there is the greatest aggregation of capital that has ever backed any American political party and, on the other, an unprecedented concentration of the toiling masses. Although the opposing class line-up and program are as yet by no means complete and clear-cut, this election fight amounts to the first real battle between the forces making for fascism and those fighting against it. And in this important situation the Socialist Party finds itself on the wrong side of the barricade. For this it is already paying dearly in lessened prestige and influence, and it is being exposed still further to the Trotskyite poison within its tissues.

#### *D. A Reactionary Peace Policy*

The new trend in the Socialist Party has not given that Party a revolutionary peace policy. True, the Socialist Party makes a great show of radicalism in its attitude towards the war that now threatens to deluge the world anew with blood. But in reality its policy in this vital matter is only its traditional reformist line, with the new sectarian trimmings.

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\* *ibid.*

Its wrong attitude stands in the way of the Socialist Party doing real anti-war service and of its developing mass leadership on this fundamental issue. The membership of the Socialist Party are, of course, genuinely in favor of peace but their Party's program is not a true peace policy. And this wrong policy in the struggle against war is made all the worse by the growing influence of the Trotskyites in the Socialist Party.

Briefly, the war situation is this: Fascist Germany, Japan and Italy in an imperialist drive to acquire markets, natural resources and colonies, and to smother their own internal crisis, are developing a great bloc for a war offensive against various other countries as occasion dictates, among them the capitalist democracies of France, England, the United States, Spain, Czechoslovakia, etc., as well as against the Soviet Union. It is a basically different situation from that prevailing on the eve of the 1914 World War. At that time two mutually warlike and aggressive groups of imperialist powers confronted each other; but now the capitalist democracies, colonies and socialist U.S.S.R., which all want peace, are definitely on the defensive in the face of the militant fascist offensive.

Should the fascist aggressors succeed in their war plans of mass slaughter and subjugation, it would be a crushing blow to liberty in every country. Their murderous attack aims to extinguish all semblances of labor organization and civil rights in Europe and to reduce the living standards of the toiling masses to coolie levels; it also menaces the political independence of many countries, and its most central objective is to drown the Soviet government in the greatest bloodbath in history. The fascist offensive threatens the very existence of modern civilization and its success would be a major disaster to the human race.

In the face of this ultra-dangerous situation the Soviet Union leads the struggle for the maintenance of peace. It seeks to develop a combined defensive by the socialist and democratic forces of the world, on the basis of a program of collective security, to stop the war which the fascists are preparing so deliberately. And more and more the world's labor movement and the democratic countries are rallying to this program. But this struggle has still greater implications than that of saving the world from a horrible slaughter. It also dovetails with the fight of the revolutionary movement for socialism at the present time. Should the combined peace forces be able to prevent the war it means that the advance of socialism thereby will be greatly facilitated in every country; and if they have to defeat militarily the fascists in a war forced by the latter it will surely be a prelude to proletarian revolutions in many

countries. The struggle to preserve democracy and to maintain peace is also, for the toiling masses, the fight for socialism.

But the so recently super-revolutionary Thomas will have none of this. He repudiates all efforts to force the American government to take a stand with other democracies against the fascist aggressors and he likewise rejects this policy for European nations. With a pseudo-radical gesture he sweeps away the correct revolutionary strategy of the Communist International and the Soviet Union. Echoing the "Red imperialism" slanders of Kautsky and the lies of Hitler that the U.S.S.R. is the real source of the war danger, Thomas denounces the Communists and other advocates of collective security against the fascist barbarians as "crusaders for a new holy war". He sneers at the peace struggle led by the Soviet Union to halt the war-making fascists as being merely preparations for "a 'good' war between capitalist nations".\* Then he plumps for the American bourgeois imperialist policy of "neutrality" and "isolation", the policy mask behind which American capitalism hides its aggressive aims.

Thomas' policy of "keeping out of it" is, in plain English, a shameful surrender before the attack of Hitler, Mussolini & Co. It is an abandonment of the embattled revolutionary labor movement of Europe. Thomas' determination not to actively assist the workers of Europe in case of a fascist-made war he justifies by the following puerile argument:

"It should be remembered that there is no particular virtue in helping- an 'innocent' nation [one of those attacked by the fascists – W.Z.F.] by enabling the du Pont family to sell powder to them at a great profit."†

The readiness of Thomas to betray the Soviet Union in case of war is clearly shown in the following disgraceful statement:

"Is not Russia today strong enough to take care of herself without asking workers in other lands in her behalf to accept the terror and futility of one more 'good' war?"‡

The American imperialist policy of "isolation", which Thomas accepts with a flourish of much radical phraseology, cannot prevent war

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\* *After the New Deal – What?* p. 218.

† *Ibid.*, p. 140.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

nor keep the United States out of war if and when it comes. "The way to keep America out of war is to keep war out of the world", correctly says the Communist Party. And this can only be done by an organized struggle for peace on the part of the antiwar forces of the world against the mad-dog fascist war-makers. The great present task of the revolutionary movement is to mobilize the workers and their allies for this struggle against war, and it is a task that the Communist Parties are everywhere loyally fulfilling. But the Socialist Party, with its "stay out of it" American capitalist neutrality theories, has abdicated mass leadership in this struggle for peace and is objectively lending support to the fascist war-makers in Europe and this country.

### *E. A Sectarian Labor Party Policy*

The matter of breaking the masses away from the two capitalist parties and building a great Farmer-Labor Party is a fundamental necessity to combat the advance of reaction and fascism in this country. And never was the sentiment so strong as now among the workers for such a party. But hesitancy and delay in the matter are highly dangerous. Because the A. F. of L. trade union bodies, upon whom the principal responsibility falls for launching such a party, have failed to act we see huge masses of discontented workers, small farmers, etc., falling under the control of the Coughlins, Lemkes, Townsends, etc., in their incipient fascist third party which is openly aiding Landon reactionaries in the election campaign. It is the great task of the Farmer-Labor Party, the American form of the People's Front, to prevent the huge toiling masses who are seething with discontent from being trapped by reactionary and fascist demagogues and to give these masses a powerful anti-fascist political weapon. It is because of these vital considerations that the Communist Party is a constant and militant fighter for the establishment of the Farmer-Labor Party.

But here again on this basic issue the Socialist Party still follows a reformist policy highly detrimental to its development of mass leadership and effective struggle. In previous pages I have pointed out that the Socialist Party with its preacher-doctor-lawyer leadership followed for many years a sectarian anti-labor party policy that was disastrous to the Socialist Party's development as a mass proletarian party, for a few years there was a tendency to correct this disastrous policy, but now the Socialist Party, with its outbreak of sectarian phrasemaking, is falling again into the historical mistake of an anti-labor party policy.

It is true that the Socialist Party does lip service to the question of the Farmer-Labor Party, but that is about as far as it goes. In practice



the Socialist Party follows a line inimical to the Farmer- Labor Party. This manifests itself by the Socialist Party's systematic opposition to all steps leading towards the actual formation of the Farmer-Labor Party. It hinders the Farmer-Labor Party by insisting upon an unduly radical program for it and by putting forth pessimistic arguments that there is as yet no mass basis for such a party. Besides, the Socialist Party takes little or no active part in the now necessary preliminary agitation and organization steps – the building of local and state parties, Farmer-Labor Party conferences, etc. – and often actually resists these movements. Thus the Socialist Party declined even to attend the important Chicago, May 30, conference called by the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party and it assumed an attitude of sharpest hostility towards the American Labor Party of New York, which is an important indication of the trend of the Committee for Industrial Organization towards a national Labor Party. And highly significant of its sectarian attitude, the Socialist Party in its most important 1936 election campaign document, the Party platform, does not even raise the question of the Farmer-Labor Party, an omission which puts forward the emaciated and half-lifeless Socialist Party, as the only political perspective, organizationally speaking, for the American working class and its allies.

The Socialist Party never, at any time, fully freed itself from the harmful illusion which it held for many years that the Labor Party was a rival party, a competitor to the Socialist Party. And now, with the new wave of sectarianism in the Socialist Party, this long-imbedded wrong conception gains fresh ground. This is clearly shown by the platform omission of the question of the Farmer-Labor Party. It is also evidenced by the fact that at the 1936 convention of the Socialist Party 64 delegates (against 119) voted opposition in principle to the Labor Party. The baneful and growing influence of the Trotskyites in the Socialist Party greatly increases this anti-Farmer-Labor Party trend. Thus the Socialist Party raises a high barrier of sectarianism that blocks its way to mass influence and leadership on the fundamentally important issue of the Farmer- Labor Party.

#### *F. Thomas' Defeatism*

To the foregoing instances of sectarian trends and openly opportunist hang-over policies from the past that still remain in the mass work of the Socialist Party many others of similar character could be added. The same narrow line is to be observed increasingly in the Socialist Party's work in the trade unions, among the unemployed, in the youth activities, among the sharecroppers, etc. And the general effect of it all is, during

the past year or so since the sectarian trends have become more pronounced, to cut away the Socialist Party's already greatly weakened mass influence and to reduce still further its badly shattered membership.

It is characteristic of Norman Thomas' role in the Socialist Party that, with his great show of radical phrase-mongering, he should find the way to distort into a sterile sectarianism the Socialist Party proletarian membership's desire to make their Party truly revolutionary. In every important situation Thomas seems to have the unhappy faculty of finding the way to inaction and surrender. He is a confirmed prophet of pessimism and defeatism. But fortunately his non-fight way is not the way of the masses. For them the class struggle is not merely a matter of philosophical speculation; their very lives and liberties are at stake, and they will fight notwithstanding the surrender advice of Thomas.

Many examples might be cited of Thomas' non-struggle policies. Thus, for instance, when Roosevelt promulgated his N.R.A. Thomas promptly called upon the workers not to strike. Happily, however, they disregarded his counsel of passive reliance upon Roosevelt and carried through successfully one of the greatest strike waves in American history. Again, in his book, *As I See It*, Thomas was at great pains to show, in his defense of purely parliamentary tactics, that armed action by the workers has been rendered obsolete and impossible by the development of the airplane and other modern military weapons. But the workers of Spain, against whom the great bulk of the trained army revolted, are now giving a glorious negative to Thomas' surrender propaganda. Thomas' abandonment of the European workers' fight for peace is also a non-struggle policy that the masses will reject. And now in his new book, *After the New Deal – What?* Norman Thomas not only sees fascism as inevitable in the United States following the next serious economic crisis,\* but more or less universal after the world war that is now brewing. But again the workers will disappoint this monumental pessimism of Thomas. They will never accept his inevitability-of-fascism theories. They will have a big word to say before fascism can possibly succeed in this country, and what realist can doubt that the next world war, instead of being followed by a spread of fascism, will give birth to a new wave of proletarian revolutions that may well crack the capitalist system all over Europe?

Thomas' new sectarianism has its roots in this basic pessimism, in his glaring lack of faith in the fighting ability of the working class and

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\* He says, "The only hope of bourgeois democracies to escape fascism is to escape this crisis." *After the New Deal – What?* p. 154.

its allies. His whole conception is an escape from the hard realities and severe tasks of the class struggle into the easy realm of glittering radical generalities. But it is a path that the working class will never tread. It will not fit itself into Thomas' narrow sectarianism, defeatism and crass opportunism. On the contrary, it will forge ahead along its line of militant mass struggle and leave the Socialist Party, if that Party persists in its present policies, sitting in sterile isolation.

## 2. THE QUESTION OF CULTIVATING THE REVOLUTIONARY FORCES

In the foregoing pages we have seen that the Socialist Party, with its new turn, has not succeeded in developing a policy that would bring it forward in a leading position among the workers and other toiling masses in their everyday struggle against the capitalist exploiters. Thus it still fails in the first essential for the establishment of the class struggle policy that is fundamentally necessary in order to build a strong revolutionary party. Now let us see what the Socialist Party is doing with regard to the second essential of such a class struggle policy- – the building up of a strong body of Marxist- Leninist understanding in and around the Party. Here, again, as we shall see, our question will receive a negative answer: the Socialist Party is also not succeeding in this most basic need.

### *A. Reformist Theoretical Weakness*

Prior to 1934, the authoritative pronouncement of the Socialist Party analysis and policy was the statement of principles adopted in the Party convention of 1924. This was a typical social reformist document of the period; it might well have been the basic program of any of the parties of the Second International. It was more conservative even than the 1920 statement (which was adopted under the influence of the Russian Revolution and the great post-war upheavals) and it contained all the theoretical misconceptions and opportunist policies that have led to the practical bankruptcy of the Second International in the face of the Russian Revolution on the one hand and the rise of fascism on the other.

The 1924 Socialist Party statement, a product of the Coolidge "boom" period, was not a program of proletarian revolution, but of the gradual growth of capitalism into socialism. The document rejects the Marxian analysis of the capitalist state as the instrument of the bourgeoisie and the revolutionary necessity for setting up the dictatorship of the proletariat – instead it is based upon the opportunist theory that the present state is a democratic people's state by means of which socialism

can be built. The 1924 program also holds forth not a Marxian perspective of class struggle culminating in the overthrow of capitalism and the "expropriation of the expropriators" without compensation, but the Bernstein conception of class collaboration, the conquest of the state by peaceful means and the purchase of the major industries from the capitalist owners.

The Detroit, 1934, statement of principles, written as I have pointed out under the pressure of the great American strike wave of the early Roosevelt years and in face of the bankruptcy of the German Socialist Party before Hitler's attacks, broke sharply with the extreme Right reformist Socialist Party conception of 1924. The new program was still full of confusion and far from being revolutionary, but it was nevertheless a big advance over the previous document.

The 1934 program rejected the reformist theory of the capitalist "people's state", began to speak of the "bogus democracy of capitalism", and made a confused approach to the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat by vague theorizing about a future "workers' democracy". The program also cast grave doubts on the efficacy of purely democratic and legal methods of struggle and declared that it was prepared if necessary to "carry the revolutionary struggle into the camp of the enemy". It also took a more militant stand against war, pronouncing itself in favor of "massed war resistance", and it made a more correct estimate of the first socialist state, the U.S.S.R. This relatively Left program was adopted by the Detroit convention only after a fierce resistance by the "Old Guard" leadership, who denounced it as Communitistic.

The Detroit, 1934, program represented progress in the direction of a revolutionary basis for the Socialist Party's work. But the Cleveland, 1936, Socialist Party convention took some steps backward by substantially watering down the Detroit document. Throughout its history the Socialist Party has opportunistically swayed back and forth in its statements of its basic principles, varying them widely according to the temporary moods of the masses. The Party was at the time no longer feeling the heavy mass pressure that it had experienced in 1934, so the 1936 Socialist Party convention, as always dominated by lawyers, preachers, doctors and other middle class intellectuals, who were alarmed at their own radicalism of 1934, characteristically decided to remove some of the "objectionable" features of the 1934 program. They also hoped that this "concession" would placate the enraged "Old Guard" Right wing of the Party led by Louis Waldman, Abe Cahan, James Oneal, then on the verge of a split.

The Detroit convention had before it a proposed program submitted by the Left wing at the Socialist Call Institute, a document which, despite its many elementary theoretical errors, would have brought the Socialist Party substantially nearer to a correct Leninist position.\* But the convention rejected this document and, instead of continuing the Party's progress Leftward, pushed it off again to the Right. The 1936 convention toned down the 1934 declaration of principles by modifying several key paragraphs in a manner considerably minimizing the necessity for a program of militant class struggle and placing more reliance upon bourgeois democracy. These retreats to the Right Norman Thomas calls an "improvement".†

In considering the status of the Socialist Party with regard to revolutionary theory attention must be focused upon its leader, Norman Thomas. In reality, so great is his influence that the Party is guided far more by what he says than by its formal declaration of principles. And Thomas' whole theoretical line makes against a revolutionary program; it works directly counter to the development of a body of Marxian revolutionary understanding in and around the Socialist Party; it cultivates reformism and sectarianism and it creates favorable conditions for the growth of Trotskyism.

The viewpoint of Norman Thomas is a melange of "Left" liberalism and Bernstein revisionism, heavily tintured with Trotskyism, and this incongruous mixture he calls "socialism". Thomas, the present "Left" leader of the Socialist Party, is even less a Marxist than was the former Right opportunist Old Guard party head, Hillquit. Not only is the basic theoretical work of the great Marxists, Lenin and Stalin, rejected completely by Thomas, but he also blithely challenges offhand even the most fundamental principles of Marx and Engels. Thus, for example, in a few lines and with a wave of the hand, he casually brushes aside the Marxian conceptions of historical materialism and of the class struggle and also the Marxian theories of value.

"...these things do not prove that all this old world needs is to accept Marxism with its materialist conception of history, class conflict and theory of value."

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\* For a detailed analysis of this document and an estimate of the general theoretical position of the Socialist Party, see Alex Bittelman's pamphlet, *Going Left*, Workers Library Publishers, New York.

† *After the New Deal – What?* p. 221.

"Not only is the concept of economic determination inadequate to the weight Marxists often put upon it but so is the more vehemently held dogma of the class struggle." \*

Thomas' latest book, *After the New Deal – What?*, is only a re-statement of the traditional reformist line of the Socialist Party, with the addition of his new sectarian tendencies. It contradicts even the relatively mild "Left" line of the 1934 Party statement of principles. Thomas shows in it that the great lessons of the Russian Revolution, the rise of fascism and the bankruptcy of the opportunist line of the Second International are quite lost upon him in the matter of working out of a Socialist policy in the United States.

In Thomas' latest book we find a repetition of the old social reformist avoidance of mass class struggle and the customary opportunist conception of the gradual growth of capitalism into socialism. He even repeats the antique and discredited reformist plan of buying the industries from the capitalists, as he proposes "to offer some compensation to the expropriated owners". † Thomas retains a childlike faith in the efficacy of capitalist democracy as the means of accomplishing socialism. He completely disregards the lessons of fascism in Europe, which prove conclusively what Marx and Lenin said many years ago, that the capitalists, including the militant

American brand, will never allow themselves to be ousted through the workers and their allies merely obtaining parliamentary majorities, but will resort to arms to defend their rulership. Thomas pins his hopes in the American capitalist democracy (with a bit of patching up here and there). He is thus an ardent advocate of American exceptionalism. Just how little a revolutionist Thomas is, despite all his pother about socialism, was shown by a revealing statement he made in June, 1936, to *The New York Times*:

"In this country we want no dictatorship, we want no revolution, there are ample constitutional ways of bringing about the change [to socialism – W.Z.F.] in a peaceful and legal manner."

From all the foregoing it is clear that the Socialist Party, as a party, is not basing itself upon revolutionary theory; and as Lenin says, without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement. With

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\* *America's Way Out*, pp. 133 and 138.

† *After the New Deal – What?* p. 163.

its present babel of conflicting group reformist theories – Old Guardism, militantism, Lovestoneism, and counterrevolutionary Trotskyism, the Socialist Party does not develop a program of militant daily mass struggle nor can it build up the indispensable core of revolutionary Marxian fighters. What progress it is making towards these essential goals comes from the pressure of the incipient Leninist-Stalinist minority in the Socialist Party. Especially does Thomas' mish-mash of opportunist theorizing stand in the way of the ideological advance of the Socialist Party. To become a revolutionary party the Socialist Party would have to overcome its shallow opportunist theories and base its policies firmly upon the study and propagation of the work of the great revolutionary leaders of the working class – Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin.

### *B. Hostility Against the United Front*

A fundamental aspect of the failure of the new leadership of the Socialist Party to cultivate the revolutionary force of the working class is its hostility towards the united front. In this anti-united front attitude there are elements of the new Socialist Party sectarianism, but the main constituents of it are remnants of the traditional war of the opportunistic Socialist Party leadership against the Left wing.

The question of unity is now one of most burning necessity to the working class in view of the growing offensive of the fascist reaction. At its recent Seventh World Congress in Moscow the

Communist International understood this clearly, saying: "At the present historical stage it is the main and immediate task of the international labor movement to establish the united front of the working class."

The Communist Parties all over the world are working actively to develop such unity of labor's forces. And that they are not striving in vain is demonstrated by the great united front movements in France, Spain, Austria, Italy, etc. In first line, all these movements are based upon formal united front agreements between the Socialist and Communist Parties.

The need for unity within the ranks of labor is also acute in the United States, and the Communist Party is the leading fighter for the united front. As part of its campaign for an eventual broad united People's Front of labor and its allies in the Farmer-Labor Party it attaches great importance to a general united front with the Socialist Party, based upon a program of struggle for immediate demands, but also

looking forward to the amalgamation of the two parties into one organization on the basis of a revolutionary fight for socialism.

Notwithstanding that the united front question played a big role in the recent defeat of the "Old Guard" leadership the present Socialist Party leaders, however, resist the striving of the Communist Party for a general united front. Thus they rejected the Communist Party proposal for a joint Socialist-Communist Party ticket in the 1936 national elections. Harking back to the traditional Socialist Party opportunist policy of war against the Left and conciliation towards the Right, they work on the theory that joint action with the Communists is a hindrance rather than an advantage. They only go as far in the direction of the united front as they are pressed by their proletarian rank and file among whom the Communist Party united front policy is very popular. The official Socialist Party stand is against a general united front with the Communist Party, but it does occasionally accept united front actions on individual issues.

On such questions as the Socialist Party and Communist Party have developed united front actions, including the amalgamation of the two unemployed organizations into the Workers Alliance, the defense of the Mooney, Scottsboro and Herndon cases, joint Socialist Party-Communist Party action in various unions, local mass demonstrations, etc., have been almost uniformly highly successful. The workers joyfully supported the unity in action of the two organizations, and the whole experience to date has gone to show that broad united front activities by the two parties on a sound program could be a powerful factor for progress in the labor movement.

But Norman Thomas, with eyes Right, wants little or none of that. In his latest book he says:

"Our fundamental task is not to unite Socialists, Communists and what we call progressives, already numerous enough to stop fascism, in one anti-fascist bloc. All of us together are, alas, too few." \*

With such characteristic confusionist arguments does Thomas justify his opportunist rejection of the united front and place obstacles in the way of labor's unity. In one breath he admits that the prospective united front forces are "already numerous enough to stop fascism" and then, in the very next breath, he bemoans that "All of us together are, alas, too few".

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\* *After the New Deal – What?* p. 214.



Negative results of this Socialist Party anti-unity line are to be seen in various united front movements, including the Farmer-Labor Party, the National Negro Congress, the National Youth Congress, and the American League Against War and Fascism. In these movements the Socialist Party policy (save in the case of individual Socialists who disregard their Party's line) boils down pretty much to one of mere fault-finding, sectarian proposals and even actual obstruction. The anti-united front tendencies in the Socialist Party are being strengthened by the growing influence of the counter-revolutionary Trotskyites.

Thomas, who is so conservative on the united front question in the United States, suddenly becomes super-radical on the united front internationally, which is only another way of opposing this policy. A la Trotsky, he is much alarmed that the Popular Front movements in France and Spain are not revolutionary enough and he criticizes them for Right opportunism. Thus, characteristically, at a big New York united front demonstration the Socialist Party, in the name of vague proposals for a workers' Spain, not only refused specifically to endorse the Spanish People's Front government, which was fighting guns in hand against fascism, but even tried to force the Communist Party to agree not to carry slogans or make speeches bearing such endorsements. But Thomas' narrow sectarian conception of the People's Front, if followed in Europe, could only have the effect of surrendering to the fascists the farmers and city middle class elements now in the Popular Front, for which decisive gift the fascists would rejoice. The Popular Front movement, despite its many weaknesses as yet in practice, is sound in principle. It is the correct revolutionary strategy in the given situation. It is the path by which the anti-fascist masses can develop basically the greatest possible struggle here and now, and it is also the strategical means by which the proletariat can gather around itself the maximum forces for the eventual revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system. It is giving new revolutionary hope, organization and fighting spirit to the masses demoralized by the ideological bankruptcy of the Second International.

The Socialist Party's openly opportunist resistance to the united front policy in the United States and its sectarian, but no less opportunist, attempt to narrow down the People's Front in Europe is a close relation of the "Old Guard's" anti-united front policy, and it is in line with that of the most reformist sections of the Second International. It demonstrates that the Socialist Party has not yet learned how to develop the revolutionary forces, its new leadership not having vanquished the reformist hang-overs from the past in this fundamental respect. The

anti-united front tendencies in the Socialist Party are a real barrier to its becoming a strong mass party and a leading fighting force.

### *C. Unfriendly Attitude Towards the Soviet Union*

In a previous chapter I have shown that one of the most fatal mistakes in the whole history of the Socialist Party, one that undermined the Party from within and alienated the best revolutionary elements from without, was its years-long attitude of hostility towards the U.S.S.R. The bitter struggle that the Socialist Party "Old Guard" petty-bourgeois leaders so long led against the first socialist country was a basic expression of their general war against the Left wing in their own Party and against every other manifestation of revolutionary spirit and program.

The Socialist Party of today, despite its new turn, has not freed itself from this fundamental error. Such antagonism to the U.S.S.R. is, in final analysis, antagonism to proletarian revolution in general. Although its rank-and-file membership are distinctly friendly to the Soviet Union, there still remains much of the old reformist anti-Sovietism in the official policy of the Socialist Party. The *Socialist Call*, for example, has long been a happy hunting ground for renegades like Zam, the Trotskyites and various other professional slanderers of the U.S.S.R. Their lies are cut from the same cloth as those of Hearst and Green, but often outdo the latter in insidious misrepresentation.

Norman Thomas, the decisive leader of the Socialist Party, is especially to be criticized for his unfriendliness towards the Soviet Union. His attitude regarding the U.S.S.R. or "Russia", as he calls it in bourgeois fashion, is about 1 per cent grudging endorsement and 99 per cent cynical criticism. It is not to be expected, of course, that a reformist Socialist should accept uncritically the Soviet government and its program, but he certainly should appraise it fairly and honestly, and this Thomas does not do. The U.S.S.R. has always welcomed sincere criticism, an example of this being the warm greeting it gave to the recent splendid book by the Webbs, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization?*, which contains no little, honest but mistaken, criticism of the Soviet system.

Thomas approaches the question of the Soviet government from a biased, antagonistic standpoint. Its gigantic achievements politically, industrially, socially leave him cold and super-critical. He sneers at the warm and loyal defense Communists make of the first socialist country, the great world stronghold against fascism, when he says, "Russia is a

kind of holy land to all Communists".\* He has never taken the trouble to visit the U.S.S.R. (although thousands of Americans have done so) to study the situation at first hand. Whenever he writes about the Soviet Union Thomas reflects in his own special way whatever anti-Soviet slanders happen to be afloat at the time. Almost any liberal bourgeois writer can be depended upon to make a fairer and more objective estimate than he of the Soviet Union.

In these crucial days of threatening war danger, with the Soviet Union menaced from both east and west by strong and ruthless fascist powers, it is the duty and interest of every revolutionist to draw closer to the U.S.S.R. and to give the most active support to its peace policy. But Norman Thomas, typically, has not the slightest sense of any such need. On the contrary, he seems to consider that now, when the U.S.S.R. is so heavily attacked, is the best time to go sniping against it. His slanderous misrepresentation of the Soviet Union during the Ethiopian war was a scandal. His reception of the great new Soviet Constitution was frigid and skeptical – a new capitalist charter for New York City would evoke more enthusiasm and fairer consideration from him. His reaction to the case of the Trotsky-Zinoviev terrorists was to put the Soviet government, not these murderers, on trial. And so it goes on every Soviet question, always Thomas is to be found casting doubts and insinuations upon the good faith of the Soviet government. He could gulp down without blinking the treacherous MacDonald and Hindenburg governments, but the revolutionary U.S.S.R. government can do nothing to suit him. And, as we have seen earlier, in his demand that "Russia" stand alone against its enemies and not call upon the workers of other countries for active assistance, he is threatening to abandon the Soviet government altogether in case of war.

The revolutionary stature of a party can be measured by its attitude towards the U.S.S.R. This is because the Soviet government is the revolution in life, the crystallization in flesh and blood of revolutionary theory and practice. The anti-Soviet tendencies in the leadership of the Socialist Party are expressions of the reformism with which the Party is afflicted. They are diluted "Old Guardism", remnants of the traditional opportunist war against the Left wing, and they are dangerously akin to Hearst's Sovietphobia. They sum up as part of the Socialist Party's general failure to cultivate and organize the revolutionary forces.

It is high time that the Socialist Party put an end to these anti-revolutionary trends. They have done incalculable harm to the Socialist Par-

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\* After the New Deal – What? p. 211.

ty ever since the November, 1917, revolution and they still continue to work their evil effects. The Socialist Party can never be on a sound mass basis until its leaders stop sniping at the U.S.S.R.; it can never become a revolutionary party until it gives, as a Party, to the Soviet government and its struggle for peace that hearty support which springs spontaneously in all revolutionary parties and which wells up naturally in the heart of every revolutionary worker.

### *The Perspective of the Socialist Party*

Now let us see to what general conclusions our analysis of the history and present situation of the Socialist Party has led us.

Firstly, we have seen in Chapter I that the basic reason why the Socialist Party has not succeeded historically in building itself into a strong mass revolutionary party is because it has followed a policy of reformism instead of one of Marxian class struggle. We have also seen that this opportunist line originated with the petty-bourgeois intellectuals who dominated the Socialist Party and systematically tried to make of it some kind of a semi-demi-progressive party. Then, in Chapters II and III, we have seen concretely how the Socialist Party, in the thirty-odd years prior to the development of its new Left turn in 1934, had continuously violated both major essentials of the necessary class struggle policy: (a) by its failure to come forward militantly as the leader of the toiling masses in their daily economic and political struggles, and, (b) by its failure to build up a solid body of Marxian understanding in the Socialist Party and among its mass following. And we have also seen how, step by step, this persistent reformist policy prevented the Socialist Party from growing and gaining broad mass influence and how it finally led to several splits and to the deep decay which the Party suffered for ten years prior to 1934.

Now, in Chapter IV, we have just checked over the present general line and condition of the Socialist Party to learn whether, since its 1934 turn Leftwards, the Party has overcome the reformist errors of its past and has laid the basis for a sound Marxian policy of class struggle. And the conclusion we are compelled to arrive at is a negative one. The old disease of opportunism still afflicts the Socialist Party, although it has taken on some new sectarian forms.

To begin with, the present day Socialist Party has not succeeded in proletarianizing its leadership, although it has freed itself of many opportunist doctors, lawyers, professors, etc., in the "Old Guard" split. As since its beginning, the Socialist Party leadership remains in the hands of the petty-bourgeois intellectuals. And the general tendency of these

officials goes to thwart the revolutionary purposes of the proletarians in the Party and to keep the Party on a reformist course, masked by revolutionary phrasemaking and Trotskyist counter-revolutionary maneuverings.

We have also seen in the present chapter how the present Socialist Party leadership still violates the two major essentials of the indispensable Marxian class struggle policy. Firstly, by its perpetuation of old reformist hang-overs and the introduction of the new sectarian opportunism, illustrated through its grossly wrong attitude on the question of the relation of the fight for immediate demands to the fight for socialism, its defeatist attitude in the struggle against fascism and war, its anti-Labor Party policy, etc., this leadership prevents the Socialist Party from coming forward in a leading role in the daily mass struggles of the workers and thus condemns the Party to isolation and impotence; and, secondly, by its gross neglect, revisionism, and antagonism towards the theoretical works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, by its hostility to the united front policy, by its consolidation with the discredited Trotskyite disrupters, and by its unfriendliness towards the Soviet Union, the Socialist Party leadership hinders the growth of the class conscious body of revolutionary fighters without whom the Socialist Party can never succeed.

The general consequence of this failure of the new Socialist Party leadership to correct the traditional and disastrous reformist line of the Party has been, instead of liquidating the Party crisis, to intensify it, especially during the past year. The Socialist Party is very sick from opportunism and Thomas' new "cure" is as bad as the old disease: indeed it is only the chronic ailment of reformism manifesting itself through new symptoms. The Socialist Party crisis spreads, deepens and becomes more threatening. The Party membership is rapidly declining, now being probably not more than half of the 19,121 that it was last year. The "Old Guard" split has wrought havoc with the Party organization in Ohio, Indiana, California, Washington, Oregon, New York, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, etc., and the Party is threatening to collapse in many other localities. The effects of the split are made worse by Thomas' silly sectarian policies and the anti-revolutionary work of the Trotskyist elements, all of which drive away many serious and honest workers. The Socialist Party is torn with factionalism, with half a dozen groups struggling for leadership; the Party is deeply confused theoretically; discipline is practically non-existent; pessimism is rampant, and there is a general falling away of members who are disgruntled and disgusted. Naturally also, the mass influence of the Socialist Party has

rapidly waned; its 1936 election vote will be greatly reduced and, actually, in the trade unions, even those led by Socialists for many years,- it has been almost wiped out.\* In short, the Socialist Party is now, as the fruit of its long-continued opportunist policies, in a most serious crisis.

Now as to the future: Is the Socialist Party on the way to collapse, or has it within it the possibility of a renaissance and growth into a strong party of real value in developing the fighting force of the proletariat and its allies? To this query the only answer that can correctly be given at present is that both positive and negative factors are at work in shaping the Socialist Party and that the fate of the Party depends upon which of these forces becomes definitely dominant.

Among the positive factors – that is, those making for a strong and revolutionary Socialist Party – the most basic one is the constant pressure upon the Socialist Party from the radicalization of the masses of workers. Faced by the surging capitalist reaction which increasingly tends in the direction of fascism, these masses, harassed by unemployment, low wages, abridged civil rights, etc., are compelled to fight. Hence, they press militantly upon the trade unions, the growing Farmer-Labor Party, and all other labor organizations, in order to utilize these bodies as fighting weapons in their growing struggle against the capitalist exploiters. It was this mass pressure, in first line, that brought about the Leftward trend in the Socialist Party, with its defeat of the "Old Guard", adoption of the Detroit, 1934, declaration of principles, etc., and it is this force which, in opposition to the present trend of the Socialist Party leadership, provides the general basis for the defeat of sectarian reformism and Trotskyism in the Socialist Party.

Dovetailing with this constructive force are the effects, on the one hand, of the open bankruptcy of the reformist, class collaboration policy of the whole Second International in the face of rising fascism and, on the other hand, of the great successes, domestic and foreign, of the Socialist Soviet Union, the growth of the Popular Front movements in Spain, France, and the general united front policy of the Communist International – all of which developments tend to press the Socialist Party in the direction of a policy of Marxian class struggle.

Another major positive force making for a fighting Socialist Party is the revolutionary example and stimulation of the Communist Party. The C.P.U.S.A. manifestly has every reason to want the Socialist Party

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\* A typical example: In the I.L.G.W.U. Local 22, New York, with 10,000 members, a traditionally Socialist Party controlled union, the Socialist Party anti-Labor Party policy was rejected by a vote of 15 to 1.

to develop in a revolutionary sense, for this means greatly to increase the power of both parties and to draw them closer together. Therefore, the Communist Party cooperates with the Socialist Party wherever possible, meanwhile making and receiving criticism in a friendly spirit. The Communist Party does what it can to strengthen the Leninist elements within the Socialist Party; it seizes upon every practical occasion to initiate joint united front campaigns of the two parties and other labor groups; its whole policy looks forward to the eventual amalgamation of the Communist Party and Socialist Party into one party upon the basis of a Leninist revolutionary program.

But there are also at work powerful negative forces that check these constructive elements and tend to push the Socialist Party deeper into the quicksand of opportunism. Among these negative forces is the important fact that the Socialist Party has not succeeded in proletarianizing its leadership. At the Party's head, as of yore, stands a group of opportunist petty-bourgeois intellectuals. These elements act as a real barrier to the translation of the revolutionary moods of the Socialist Party's proletarian members into terms of a Marxist-Leninist policy for the Party.

Next there is the negative force of the traditional reformist line of the Socialist Party. The destructive opportunist policies which, as we have seen in detail, have through the course of the years brought the Socialist Party to the brink of ruin, still remain basically in effect. Their new sectarian trimmings by no means mitigate their disastrous consequences upon the Party.

And then there is that new malignant disease of the Socialist Party, the plague of Trotskyism. The admission of the counterrevolutionary Trotskyites was an injection of deadly poison into the life tissues of the Socialist Party. They are not only worsening every traditional weakness of the Party but are introducing a whole series of new difficulties for it.

Of these positive and negative forces, of which I have cited only those of a major character, it must be admitted that the negative ones are now in the ascendant. Corroding and destructive, they are rapidly isolating the Socialist Party from the masses and disintegrating its organization. It is certain that with its present leadership and policies the Socialist Party is on the way to impotence. Unless both are changed, unless the forces that produced the 1934 Left turn and overthrew the "Old Guard" can go forward to their necessary goal by giving the Socialist Party a revolutionary leadership and policy, the Socialist Party's days as an important factor in the labor movement are over. In their time both the Socialist Labor Party and the Industrial Workers of the

World were militant organizations that played a progressive role in the developing revolutionary movement. But they failed to learn the lessons of the class struggle of their period and did not adapt themselves to the changing fighting needs of the workers. So they became isolated from the advancing masses and fell into decline and sectarian mummification. Is the Socialist Party doomed to travel the same fatal path?