
America: The Foundation of a Communist Party

by “Y.”

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The Socialist Party of America, led by the notorious traitors to Socialism, Algernon Lee and Maurice [sic.] Hillquit, has long been ripe for a split. On April 9th [1918], 7 of the party representatives voted for the 4th Liberty Loan. The action aroused a storm of indignation in the Left Wing, which demanded that the satellites of the government should be expelled from the party. Shortly afterwards, a number of Left Wing members of the New York branch led by Larkin, Mac-Alpine, Fraina, and Reed, published the Manifesto-Program of the Left Wing of the Socialist Party. The most noteworthy passage in this document runs as follows:

In the beginning of August 1914, the world had the aspect of a volcano about to erupt. The periodic succession of violent explosions heralded a catastrophe; but the diplomatists and statesmen did their best to localize the disturbances; while the masses in every case, after some slight stirring, relapsed into lethargic slumber, troubled only by vague apprehensions and gloomy forebodings, what time the subterranean fires were growing ever fiercer.

Many had blind faith in the wisdom of the governments, and in the powerful influence of Christianity uniting in fraternal ties the peoples of the civilized world. Others put their trust in the growing strength of the international Socialist movement. The German Social Democrats and the French Socialists exchanged telegrams solemnly pledging themselves not to participate in the war should war be declared by their respective governments. If instead of sending telegrams the Socialists of these countries had organized a general strike, they would doubtless have been able to make the governments hear reason....

The Social Democrats failed to do their duty, and the war broke out. “Revolutionary Socialism,” the manifesto goes on to say, “was not for long content to remain passive. In Germany, Karl Liebknecht, Franz Mehring, Rosa Luxemburg, and Otto Ruhle founded the Spartacus Group. But their voices were drowned by the roar of the cannon and by the groans of the

mutilated and dying.”

Subsequently the authors of the manifesto express their emphatic disagreement with the Socialists of the Right upon the matter of party tactics. The Socialists of the Right are doing everything in their power to counteract the revolution which is ripening among the masses. But the manifesto declares that the universal support of this same revolution is “the essential problem before the party.”

The manifesto subjects the League of Nations to a pitiless criticism, showing that the League is merely a new form of “Imperialist capitalism.” It warns the workers against putting their trust in “bourgeois reforms,” which are instituted for the sold purpose of quenching revolutionary fires. The American capitalists wish to make use of the labor organizations for their own imperialist aims. “We are convinced that in the near future our capitalists will begin to talk, like Bismarck, of the absolute necessity of instituting labor legislation, with state insurance for old age and unemployment. They will institute various other bourgeois reforms whose purpose it is to fit the workers as instruments for supplying the capitalists with the maximum of profit in the shortest possible time.”

The manifesto insists that the center of gravity of Socialist work is not to be found in the parliamentary activities of representatives of the working class, but in the direct action of the masses. The Socialist Party, therefore, must deliberately guide the class struggle of the workers, and must formulate a clear-cut program to be realized by the coming proletarian revolution. The following is such a program:

1. The organization of workers’ councils; propaganda on behalf of the Soviet idea; the extending of a helping hand to all such working class mass organizations as are really of the Soviet type, to all such organi-

zations as are well suited for the direct carrying on of the class struggle, for the seizure of the power of the state, and for the foundation of a new proletarian state which shall organize all the workers and be the instrument of proletarian dictatorship.

2. Self-government in industry realized through the industrial organizations of the workers (industrial unions or industrial councils), this being the antithesis of nationalization and the state control of industry.

3. Repudiation of national and municipal debts, with compensation for the holders of small parcels of stock.

4. Expropriation of the banks as a first step towards the complete expropriation of capital.

5. Expropriation of the railways and of all the trusts, without compensation — for compensation would enable the capitalists to continue the exploitation of the workers. But the owners of small-scale undertakings must be furnished with the means of livelihood during the transition period.

6. Socialization of foreign commerce.

The Left Wing Socialists did not let matters rest with the publication of this manifesto. In addition they instituted energetic revolutionary propaganda. During April [1919] they founded in New York a journal to voice their views, *The Communist*. This is edited by John Reed; MacAlpine, Gurvich [Nicholas Hourwich], and B. Gitlow are on the editorial staff. Two other organs represent the same trend: *The Revolutionary Age*, edited by Louis Fraina; and *The Liberator*, edited by Max Eastman.

These revolutionary activities on the part of the US Communists have aroused the fierce hostility of the Right Wing leaders, who accuse the Communists of infringing party discipline, of founding secret organizations in the party, and so on. In the end, the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party of America decided to expel a number of foreign groups and Left Wing organizations. This reduced the membership of the party by more than half.

The Left Wing organizations then summoned their own congress, which opened in New York on June 22nd [1919]. It was decided to found a new party, to be known as the Communist Party. A program was

adopted substantially identical with that detailed above. As far as parliamentarism is concerned, we may quote the following passage of the program: "We do not repudiate the parliamentary struggle; we shall participate in electoral campaigns, shall run candidates for Congress, and for various other positions in social life. But we participate in the parliamentary struggle only in so far as our representatives in Congress can be considered agitators, preaching the ideas of the social revolution."

Unfortunately we have no information as to the decision adopted concerning adhesion to the Third International. All we know is that the question was on the agenda.

Nor have we any information as to the numerical strength of the party. It is quite possible that the party has not yet assumed the character of an organization of the masses. But in the epoch of universal history upon which we have now entered, every great movement of the toiling masses and the oppressed invariably assumes a Communist form and inevitably culminates in a struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat. At this juncture, America may be described as an erupting volcano. Strikes follow one another ceaselessly. In many of the states there have been armed revolts among the negroes, who demand equal rights. More than 100,000 fully armed Afro-Americans took part in what amounted to actual battles in the streets of Chicago. The revolt was led by colored ex-soldiers back from the front.

We have to remember that the colored population of the US is estimated at 12 million, and that two of the revolutionary watchwords: "Equality before the Law," and "Humane Treatment," are greatly appreciated by these oppressed millions.

We are confident that our American comrades will unite into a single stream the scattered torrents of the mass movement, that they will free it from foreign bodies, and will break the lava crust which has formed upon the surface. Then, from the rumbling volcano of the capitalist order there will escape a brilliant and mighty jet of flame which will consume all the obstacles in its path, and will crystallize, as it cools, to form a new society of labor.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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