

PARTY PRE-CONVENTION DISCUSSION SECTION

Bourgeois Reformism and Social Reformism

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER.

(The article which follows is a continuation of the article by Comrade Foster in the Daily Worker of Feb. 12th, entitled, "As to New Lines and Old Lines." In this first article he took issue sharply with the criticism of his article ("The Decline of the A. F. of L." in the Jan.-Feb. issue of "The Communist") made by Comrades Bittelmann, Browder, Aronberg, Hathaway, Wagenknecht, Costrell, Gomez and Grecht, in the Daily of the previous day, as well as with the answer in the same issue of "The Communist" by Comrade Bedacht. In the article which follows, Comrade Foster continues his discussion of the situation of social reformism in the labor movement.)

The central issue involved in the controversy now turning around my article in the current number of "The Communist" deals primarily with the role of social reformism in the class struggle and its relation to bourgeois reformism. It will be well, therefore, to consider this matter first and subsidiary questions later.

1.—Social Reformism the Main Danger.

Of the two phases of capitalist reformism, social reformism presents the main danger for the working class. This is because of (1) its strong organizational base in the corrupted labor aristocracy and labor bureaucracy, and (2) its insidious approach to the workers under the guise of being the working class program.

The social democratic leadership, basing itself primarily upon the corrupted labor aristocracy and labor bureaucracy, uses all of its great power as the controlling head of vast political and industrial organizations of the workers to push through its program of social reform, which is only the program of the employers disguised and which paralyzes the action of the workers. With the help of the employers and the state it makes ruthless war upon the Communists at the head of the increasingly revolutionary masses, breaking strikes and otherwise demoralizing the workers' mass attacks against capitalism and steering it into illusory channels of reform. The disastrous betrayals of the workers in the post-war revolutionary struggles in Germany, in the British general strike, as well as in a thousand other working class battles, show how effectively the capitalists use against the revolutionary workers the powerful social democratic, social reformist organization. The treachery of the A. F. of L. bureaucracy and the socialist party can only be understood in the same sense.

Social reformism not only has a powerful organizational base in the skilled aristocracy of labor, but its manner of approach to the mass of workers is far more insidious and demoralizing than that of bourgeois reformism. The social reformists, who include the A. F. of L. bureaucracy, typically present to the workers as their own program capitalist reformism dressed up in working class clothes.

This is what gives it its especially

dangerous character. Social democracy is the principal instrument of the employers to weaken the ideology of the working class, to prevent the growth of revolutionary understanding and struggle among the workers, by the sowing of reformist illusions among them and by forceful break-up of their movement. It is the central enemy that the Communist Party has to defeat in order to gain the leadership of the masses in the struggle against capitalism for the proletarian revolution.

2.—The Varying Tempo of Social Reformism.

So much for the matter of concentrating our fire on the main enemy, social reformism, that is, upon the A. F. of L. bureaucracy and the S. P. Now to consider the question of whether or not the A. F. of L. is in decline, and if this is so, does it, as Comrade Bittelmann declares, imply the declining role of social reformism?

Although the capitalists, without let-up, utilize social reformism to demoralize the working class and to break up its mass attacks, they do this with varying degrees of intensity and under various forms. Social reformism is not a static thing used by the employers with the same tempo and forms regardless of the changing objective situation. In times of less pressure from the masses the employers tend to rely more upon their own methods of direct control, that is, force and bourgeois systems of reform. But in times of increasing attack from the workers they tend to call social democracy more and more directly into their service, that is, to make increasing use of their master weapon against the workers, social reformism.

3. The Question of Decline and Crisis.

During the periods of the more open capitalist dictatorship social reformist organizations may and sometimes do go into decline and crisis. This has been the situation with the A. F. of L. for several years. Such organizations may even be destroyed altogether, if the open forms of the capitalist dictatorship are severe and prolonged. In such periods, the social democracy, always the willing tool of the employers, makes frantic efforts, through all sorts of concessions and treachery, to win back the support

of the employers, to readapt themselves to the needs of the capitalists.

Comrade Bittelmann is wrong when he categorically declares that it is impermissible to speak of social reformist organizations, in a given situation, being in crisis or decline. He is also incorrect when he declares that if it is said that a given social reformist organization, the A. F. of L., is in decline, this necessarily implies a theory of the liquidation of the A. F. of L. and of social reformism. The dialectics of social reformism altogether escape him.

Let us consider the situation in Italy, for example. There fascism, "a method of the unconcealed dictatorship of the bourgeoisie," (Comintern program) has not only sent the socialist party and the General Confederation of Labor into decline, but it has practically wiped them out entirely. (Now the CROM of Mexico also is in a serious crisis.) But does the smashing of the traditional social reformist organizations in Italy mean that the Italian capitalist class has completely and finally abandoned the social reformist method and will rely solely

4. American Trustified Capital and Social Reformism.

In view of the foregoing analysis, let us now examine the extent to which trustified capital, the decisive section of capital, has tended to rely upon direct bourgeois dictatorship and how much it has tended towards utilizing social reformism. We must see how it has oscillated between methods of open dictatorship and of social reformism. This we shall do, looking towards a solution of the question of whether or not the A. F. of L. is in decline or crisis, and if so, what this signifies.

It is indisputable that American trustified capital has in general tended to depend more upon its own direct methods of terrorizing and corrupting the workers and to use less the traditional methods and organizations of social reformism than has been the case in any other country. This has been because of the extremely favorable objective conditions under which capitalism has

developed in this country; the ultra-rapid growth of the industries in general and the trusts in particular, the rich natural resources of the country, the presence of a working class whose development was relatively slow because of various bourgeoisifying tendencies (free land, etc.), lack of heterogeneity, etc.

The capitalists have been strong enough to, as a rule, take pretty directly in hand themselves the job of corrupting the labor aristocracy and of smashing back the movements of the masses through use of state power, economic pressure and bourgeois reformism. But, despite this, they have not failed to promptly all into their service the social reformist agents wherever and whenever they have felt the need for them. In the United States, as well as in Europe, social reformism has developed with vary-

ing tempo in the different periods. Let us divide recent labor history into four periods, (a) pre-war, (b) war, (c) post-war, (d) present period, and the varying tempo of social reformism in the class struggle becomes clearly evident. In the pre-war era, that is, during the period of the formation of the trusts and up to the entrance of the United States into the world war, trustified capital relied relatively very little upon social reformism, especially in its dealings with the workers directly in the industries. It took directly upon itself the job of corrupting the labor aristocracy and breaking up the movements of the semi-skilled and unskilled. It drove even the conservative A. F. of L. unions out of the trustified industries. The smashing of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers in the Homestead strike was the signal of the pre-war open shop policy of trustified capital.

Revolt in Venezuela Grows; Dictator Acts to Crush Outbreaks

CUCUTA, Colombia, Feb. 19.—Reports received here from Venezuela indicate a widespread revolutionary situation there, which the supporters of General Cedeno, who is reported marching from the south on Caracas, are seeking to take advantage of.

General Vicente Perez-Soto, president of the state of Zulia, and President Garbi of the state of Sucre, both close friends of the dictator, Juan Vicente Gomez, have been arrested by Gomez, charged with revolutionary conspiracy. Other arrests are pending. It is said a large cargo of arms for rebels was found at the port of La Guaira.

The Cedeno revolt, while it may make use of the mass anger against the Gomez regime, promises nothing better. Cedeno is famed for his intrigues with any and all imperialists who will back him and his clique in a coup. Undoubtedly, one or another of the British or American oil interests is backing Cedeno.

No sooner is the exploitation of the laborer by the manufacturer, so far as an end, that he receives his wages in cash, then he is set upon by the other portions of the bourgeoisie, the landlord, the shop-keeper, the pawnbroker, etc.—Karl Marx (Communist Manifesto).

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without and to avoid the organization of the conservative unions. This did not prevent the capitalists, however, from making use of the A. F. of L. leaders politically, through the National Civic Federation, the capitalist parties, etc., to demoralize the workers. It was characteristic of this period that great employers who would not permit an A. F. of L. organizer within a mile of their industrial plants would sit down and hob-nob with these same organizers, or their chiefs, in such class collaboration institutions as the National Civic Federation.

During the war period the capitalists modified very considerably their attitude towards the A. F. of L. unions. Their tendency was to make more use of social reformism. To mobilize the workers for the war they had to call more directly than ever before the leaders of the A. F. of L. into their service. Result, a wide modification of their former open shop policy and an extension of the trade unions into many industries. But this concession to the A. F. of L. was made with reluctance. While on the one hand allowing the unions freely to organize in the railroad, ship-building and other industries, the employers at the same time developed the company union movement as a barrier against a too wide spread of the unions. In many industries, notably steel, they refused to depart from the open shop policy and met with powerful resistance the attempts of the workers to organize into the A. F. of L.

During the Post-War Period.

During the post-war period the pendulum swung far back in the reverse direction, towards the methods of open dictatorship. The employers generally, following the lead of big capital, largely cast aside social reformism and delivered a violent attack against the trade unions in every industry. The state power was used violently to smash the old unions.

The objective of this assault, the greatest in the history of the American labor movement, was not merely to wipe out the higher wages and shorter hours won by the workers in

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Story of Soviet Rescue, "Krassin" Best Seller at Workers Book Shop

"The Krassin" is the title of a newly-published book written by a French Communist journalist, Maurice Parjanne, whose book is rapidly approaching the best-seller class, according to Aaron Chover, manager of the Workers Bookshop, 26 Union Square, who says that the book is having the largest sale a non-fiction book has had for some time.

The hero of the book is not an individual, but a ship, an icebreaker in the Soviet navy which quietly and unobtrusively smashed her way through hazardous icefloes and survived danger to rescue the survivors of the Italia.

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