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# Radicalism in America.

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The United States is due for a strong radical wave. The whole civilized world is in a state of social and political ferment, and America is bound to be drawn into the general revolutionary current. The tendency towards a powerful movement of radicalism is clear and unmistakable. The symptoms of its rapid approach are multiplying. The industrial and financial derangements of the country are daily assuming more threatening proportions. The high cost of living keeps on mounting fast while wages move up at dishearteningly slow pace and unemployment reaches serious dimensions. The ruling classes have proved themselves ludicrously inadequate to cope with the critical situation. Blind to the glaring signs of the new time, anxious to maintain their privileges uncurtailed, and reckless of ultimate consequences, they have embarked upon a policy of impossible promises and quack remedies coupled with high-handed methods of industrial repression and political violence. American workers are sore and humiliated, American liberals are outraged, American radicals are exasperated.

A large body of popular discontent and unrest is abroad, larger than at any previous time in the history of the republic. It is directed against both old parties as the political instruments of the ruling classes, and manifests itself in a deep indifference towards the feigned fight of the uninspiring Republican and Democratic candidates. It is directed against the official leadership of organized labor in the American Federation of Labor and the Railway Brotherhoods, which has shown itself

timid, reactionary, and inept at a time when labor's most crying need is for resolute and aggressive action. It expresses itself in frequent overthrows of old-line leaderships, in numerous secessions, and in the irrepressible "outlaw" strikes.

The sentiment of revolt is as yet largely negative, unformulated and unorganized, but it will find voice and form eventually.

What are the present political indications of its probable concrete development?

Since our entry into the world war and the resultant political and economic upheavals the radical forces in American politics have been enriched by two new groups: the American Labor Party, which has somewhat suddenly turned into a "Farmer-Labor" Party, and the "Left Wing" Socialists, who have gradually evolved into a "Communist" movement. Let us consider their respective contributions to the organized radical movement in America.

## **The Farmer-Labor Party.**

The first sporadic attempts to form political labor parties in several industrial centers of the country were met by the socialists of America in a spirit of rather benevolent neutrality. The socialists pursue no personal or party interests in politics. Their aim is to abolish capitalism with all the evils that term implies and to socialize the industries of the country. Whether this program is to be carried out by the Socialist Party as at present constituted or by any other organization or by a

combination of organized political, industrial, and spiritual forces, is a matter of comparative indifference to them.

The cardinal point upon which there is general agreement in the socialist ranks is that no socialist revolution can be successfully accomplished in the United States without the active support and participation of the large masses of the American workers acting as a class in conscious and organized opposition to the ruling classes. The bulk of the American workers have not yet reached the point of political class-consciousness. The task of the radical movement is to educate them, to it. This process of education may follow one or both of two conceivable lines of development. A socialist movement may begin with a small group of fully schooled and trained socialists and increase its strength by a steady stream of individual converts, or it may take its starting-point in a large body of workers organized for the protection of their class interests but without a definite program of ultimate social and political aims, and even without a clear conception of the class character of their own movement. Socialist progress in such a case may be made through the process of growing class-consciousness and revolutionary clarity of the movement as a whole. Needless to say that both methods of socialist growth, the quantitative as well as the qualitative, may coexist and supplement each other. The first method is that of the Socialist Party. The second might conceivably have been adopted by the Labor Party.

It was undoubtedly the expectation of some of the founders of the party, notably the former Socialist Party members among them, that it would follow that course. "The Socialist program is fundamentally sound," they argued, "but the body of American workers are not ripe for it and are deeply prejudiced against the term Socialism. They can, however, be approached through the medium of a labor party, and once arrayed against all old parties in independent working-class political struggle, they cannot fail in the long run to draw the ulti-

mate consequences of the fight."

The Labor Party would have justified such expectations and given promise of becoming an active factor in the struggle for the emancipation of labor if it had succeeded in enlisting the support of the bulk of the organized workers in the United States, or failing that, if it had at least established itself as a radical minority within the organized labor movement, determined to wrest the leadership from the hands of the reactionaries. Its whole existence and hope of success lay in the fact that it was frankly a class party — a political organization of labor. Unfortunately the leaders of the new movement seemed to realize this cardinal point only during the formative stages of their party. When they entered upon their first national political campaign, they succumbed completely and pitiably to the besetting vice of "practical" American politics, the sacrifice of principle to the desire of momentary political success, the selling of the soul for votes.

The fusion of the Labor Party with the nebulous aggregation of middle-class liberals known as the "Committee of 48" was an irretrievable surrender of the vital working-class character of the new party, and the coupling of its political destinies with the purely imaginary forces of the farming community made confusion worse confounded. It is therefore not to be wondered at that the party has produced a platform which is little more than a heterogeneous assortment of meaningless liberal and radical phrases utterly devoid of the cohesive cement of the modern working-class philosophy, nor that it has named for its principal standard bearer a man whose name and record stand for nothing in the labor movement or in the radical political movement of the country. The Farmer-Labor Party has killed the Labor Party and committed suicide with one blow. It will hardly survive the presidential election for any length of time, and will eventually dissolve into the separate incongruous elements which go into its make-up or patch-up.

### **The “Communist” vs. the Socialist Movement.**

The birth of the Labor Party was to some extent a manifestation of impatience with the “dogmatic,” “uncompromising,” and “unpatriotic” policy of the American socialists; the formation of the “communist” movement, on the other hand, was the expression of equal impatience with their “wavering,” “opportunistic,” and “nationalistic” tactics.

The presence of an extreme group in any radical movement is quite desirable. By their constant insistence upon purity of principle and method, even when such insistence is pedantic, they serve to check any existing tendencies toward opportunism. The Socialist Party of the United States, as the socialist parties in all other countries, has always had and probably always will have such groups. But the specific “Left Wing” movement which sprang up in this country about two years ago was entirely different in origin and character. It was not a legitimate reaction against undue conservatism in the Socialist Party. The party had all through the war and after the war taken the most advanced international socialist position.

Rather was it a peculiar echo of the Russian Bolshevik revolution, a quixotic attempt to duplicate it in the United States, to copy its methods, repeat its phrases, and imitate its leaders and heroes. It was an unpractical as it was romantic, and only the extraordinary glamour and fascination of the great Russian revolution can account for the spread of the movement, short-lived as it was. While the “Left Wing” propaganda was limited to negative criticism of Socialist Party methods, and had the abundant arsenal of epithet and invective of the chairman of the Moscow Interna-

tional [Grigorii Zinoviev] to draw upon for weapons against the Socialist “leaders,” all went well, but when the apostles of the new movement were confronted with the task of concrete organization and positive work, they foundered upon the rock of their confused theories and impossible creed. The short history of their existence as “communists” has been marked by endless internecine strife and successive splits, each faction accusing the other of bourgeois conservatism and treachery to the revolution. Today the much-heralded movement is reduced to a few thousand Russians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and Letts [Latvians] engaged in a comic-opera game of underground conspiracy to overthrow the bourgeois government of the United States, and a handful of American intellectuals with a generous sprinkling of Department of Justice agents. To the jaded tastes of some literary dilettanti and faddists such a blood-and-thunder pastime may provide a pleasant stimulus, but as a serious social movement aiming to lead the great masses of the American people in the paths of proletarian revolution, it is a ludicrous fiasco.

Thus neither the Farmer-Labor Party nor the Communist Party, the new parties to the “right” and to the “left” of American socialism, have made any essential contribution to American radicalism. The Socialist Party still holds the leadership in radical politics in the United States. Its ranks have been weakened of late by the “labor” and “communist” secessions and by government persecution. But the very failure of the rival organizations will in the long run prove a source of new socialist strength as will also the official attacks. The serious-minded working-class radicals still have only one present hope and one logical rallying point — the Socialist Party.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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