The Socialist City Convention

Groups in the S. P. - Perspectives of the Left Movement - The Line of the Communists

by Will Herberg

The recent New York city convention (December 27 and 28) of the Socialist Party deserves the most careful attention of every Communist. The proceedings of the convention showed in all clarity the deep processes at work within the Socialist movement of this country.

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THREE GROUPS IN THE SP

That within the Socialist Party today there can be distinguished three distinct tendencies each with its own platform and political outlook the convention made abundantly clear. In the first place, there is the **extreme right Norman Thomas group**, composed largely of bourgeois liberals whose number in the SP has been increasing pretty considerably in recent years. The general line of this group is for the dissolution of the Socialist party into the general bourgeois liberal-radical movement (particularly in the form of a "third party"). The forte of this group is municipal politics which it understands completely in the sense of bourgeois municipal reformism. It thoroly deprecates any "undue attention" to the workers on the part of the SP and believes that the Socialist movement should address itself to the "people as a whole" (i.e., to the petty bourgeoisie). This extreme right group, thoroly bourgeois and anti-Socialist in every sense, has managed to clothe itself in a "left" mantle because of its characteristic liberal championship of "fair play" and its opposition to the gross excesses of burocracy within the SP and especially of the SP officials in the trade unions.

In the second place we have the **right wing Hillquit-Oneal group** which represents the so-called "orthodox Socialist" burocracy in the party, the "old timers." The orientation of this group is upon the labor burocracy and its chief objective is to capture some A. F. of L. "respectability" for the SP. The line of this group, which today dominates the SP, is that of utmost reformism and vulgar pseudo-Marxism coupled with abject fawning before the reactionary anti-Socialist officials of the trade unions. This group is the real American representative of international Social-democracy, of the Second International.

In the struggle partly against the liberalizing Thomas tendency but above all against the arch-reformist Hillquit group, a **leftward tendency** has been making rapid progress in the Socialist party. It has already reached the stage where it is conscious of its own existence as a distinct political tendency (i.e., it has already organized itself as a distinct faction) altho, of course, it is still almost totally unconscious of the objective logic of its own development. The base of this leftward tendency seems to be some strata of rank and file trade unionists and considerable sections of the younger elements of the Socialist movement, especially of the Socialist youth.

As distinct from the first two factions, which represent already formed and unchangeable political tendencies, the left group manifests as its chief feature a continuous ever changing dynamic character. This fundamental feature also distinguishes the leftward movement from classical centrism, altho there can be no question that considerable centrist elemen and potential, are swept in with the movement to the left and are still undifferentiated from it.

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THE QUESTIONS AT ISSUE

The political struggles that took place at the city convention dramatized the three-cornered differentiation within the Socialist party. But it also focussed attention upon the essential character of the leftward movement, upon its strength and upon its weaknesses.

The most basic question that faced the convention, altho characteristically enough it did not even come up for a vote, was the question of attitude towards the Russian Revolution. The "Russian question" still forms the fundamental line of cleavage separating the revolutionaries from the reformists in the labor movement and it is an extremely hopeful sign for the left movement that it is precisely upon this question that it took its clearest and its sharpest stand. Two resolutions lay before the conference. The Hillquit-Oneal resolution took an outright anti-Soviet position, thoroly in line with the Kautskyan viewpoint of the Second International. The resolution introduced by the Stanley group, on the other hand, was thoroly pro-Soviet **not merely in sentiment but in revolutionary** class content. It recognized completely that the USSR is a workers state, building Socialism. It adopted a "definitely friendly attitude" towards the Soviet Union. It called for support of the Five-Year Plan, declaring that the building of Socialism in the USSR "is consistent with Socialist philosophy"—precisely the opposite of the viewpoint of international Social-democracy.

It is clear from a mere reading of both resolutions that on this question (and the question is fundamental) the differences have already reached the point where they cannot remain within the bounds of one party. The stand for the USSR is unquestionably the strongest feature of the leftward movement in the SP.

On other questions the views of the left group are not so clear or well defined. Yet even here a distinct leftward trend is visible. On the trade union question, for example, Oneal (the right wing) introduced a shameless resolution in support of the old line of the SP which increasing numbers of Socialists are beginning to realize is a definitely anti-labor line. The left faction introduced a somewhat vague and rather weak resolution. But this resolution distinctly demanded a fight against the A. F. of L. non-partisan policy, against class collaboration, for industrial unionism, for the organization of the organized. The differences in the discussion of the resolution were far sharper than in the resolutions themselves. And in the end the Stanley resolution succeeded in getting about 40% of the votes (41 out of 102)!

The lowest point reached by the left wing was on the India resolution where it adopted a thoroly liberal Norman Thomas stand without revolutionary or class content. Just as the USSR resolution marked the strength of the left group so did the India resolution mark its weakness.

A curious thing happened in connec with the resolution on Socialist Party campaigns introduced by Lee (for the Hillquit group). This resolution was full of "left"-sounding phrases and contained a sharp attack upon the Norman Thomas municipal reformism. The factional line-up was quite obvious. In the course of the debate Stanley got up and for the left group made a declaration that the "militants" were not to be identified with the Lee resolution. Evidently the hopes of a flirtation with the Norman Thomas extreme right still lingers in the breasts of the leaders of the left group. On the other hand when Hilquit, with his pseudo-Marxist profundity, branded the lefts as "petty bourgeois radicals", a left delegate interrupted with the remark that it must be Norman Thomas to whom Hillquit was referring! So the beginnings of an understanding of the real class role of the Thomas tendency seems to be penetrating the leftward movement, altho a false estimation on this question still remains the biggest pitfall in the way of developing leftward movement.

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THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE LEFTWARD MOVEMENT

The differentiation process in the Socialist Party not only reflects a similar process taking place internationally within the Social-democratic movement, it is also an expression of deep changes taking place in the American labor movement, in the realignment of forces within the trade unions, in the emergence of a new left wing. From this viewpoint there is a close inner connection between the developments in the Socialist party and the processes at work in the Conference for Progressive Labor Action ("Muste movement"). Both Stanley and Oneal are leading figures in the CPLA and the gap that is widening between them in the SP is reflected in another form in the differentiation process under way in the progressive movement itself.

The leftward movement in the Socialist Party is still extremely immature, heterogeneous in its composition and utely amorphous in its political outlook It is not yet the end—it is only the beginning. Realignments of forces within the left wing and between the left wing and the SP as a whole are inevitable as the movement gains in maturity.

The most characteristic feature of the leftward movement in the SP is its **political short-sightedness**, its political blindness. The left group believes its viewpoint to be fully compatible with the fundamental principles of the Social-democratic movement. They cannot see that between its views even as they are today and the foundation principles of the Socialist party is already a fundamental chasm (witness the two resolutions on Russia) and that even on strategical-tactical question the differences are assuming a programmatic character. But what is hidden from them is very clear indeed to Hillquit and Oneal!

Two roads lie before the leftward movement in the SP: **either towards Communism** (which means, withdrawal—voluntary or involuntary—from the SP **or to capitulation!** No middle course is permanently possible; this has been adequately proved by the whole history of centrist movements in Europe and in this country. This too is still unintelligible to the leaders of the left group altho the right wing burocrats appreciate it thoroly. **"Some of you will leave us just as others have left us before!"** warned Oneal at the city convention.

The inner contradictions within the leftward movement in the Socialist Party are a sign of its immature and transitory development; further development will resolve this contradiction one way or the other. But the direction in which this contradiction is ultimately resolved will not be independent of the attitude of the Communists and of their course in relation to the developing left wing in the SP.

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THE LINE OF THE COMMUNISTS

The traditional policy of the Communists towards left wing developments in the Social-democratic parties was clearly defined in the resolution of the VI Plenum of the Comintern (1926):

> "The attitude of the Comintern and the Communist Parties towards the growing opposition within the reformist (organizations) is quite clear. It is the outcome of the fundamental rules of Bolshevist tactics: **support at all times for every opposition movement within reformist political . . . organizations which is directed against the theory and practise of these organizations.** We cannot and must not wait until these left tendencies crystallize completely; we must use all our energy and strength to help the opposition movement, to assist those workers who are beginning to shake themselves free of reformist ideology . . . In a word Communist Parties must be quick to respond to all processes within the reformist organizations—to all ideological ferment—and do their utmost to help these elements within the reformist organizations in their struggle against class collaboration."

This line of policy received brilliant confirmation in practise in the successful campaigns carried thru by the Communist International in connection with the development of left wings in the Social-democracies of Hungary, Austria, Germany, etc. But of course today the attitude of the Comintern is quite different. In the most serious way the ultra-left line today regards all leftward movements in the SP as "a conspiracy to fool the workers"! For the official Communist Party there can therefore be no question of doing anything whatever in connection with any leftward movement in the SP except heaping upon it meaningless abuse. Even a sharp criticism and exposure of the dangerous errors and shortcomings of the lefts in the SP are beyond the powers of the official leaders of the Communist movement today.

It therefore falls to us—the Communist Opposition movement—to attempt to carry thru the tasks which the development of the class struggle puts before the Communist Party but which the Party leaders consistently refuse to carry out o even to face.

PLAN HUGE SILVER LOAN TO CHINA

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ed from the Senate.

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The proposal for a huge silver loan to Chiang Kai-shek by the United States is the principal part of a planned offensive of Wall Street for complete hegemony in China. It is a plan, on the one hand, to strengthen the Nanking government (which is the chosen agent of American imperialism) and make its influence dominant thruout China, and, on the other hand, to make Chiang Kai-shek completely subservient to Wall Street. The recent relative consolidation of the Nanking government thru the defeat of the Northern coalition provides a good basis for such an attempt.

From an economic viewpoint the pla is to seize a tight hold of the incalculably valuable Chinese market for the United States and so help overcome the discrepancy between productive capacity and marketing possibilities that lies at the root of the present economic crisis. Of course such a solution of the crisis would be made at the expense of the Chinese workers and farmers who would be surrendered even more thoroly than today to the tender mercies of the huge American banks and financial houses, than whom no more ruthless exploiters exist in the whole world.

Finally the proposal of the Senate subcommittee is aimed at the rising revolutionary movement in town and country which all of the murderous brutalities of Chiang Kai-shek have not succeeded in repressing.

It is clear that the plan of the Senate subcommittee will meet with great resistance on the part of Great Britain and Japan since it is aimed to a large extent in destroying the influence of these powers in China and in establishing the undisputed hegemony of Yankee imperialism. The U. S. government is planning to meet this resistance by proposing to "invite" other powers to participate in the loan—playing second fiddle, o course to the United States.

Involved in the whole affair is also an attempt of the U. S. A. to win Canada and Australia for the American Chinese policy as opposed to the British course

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