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New Phenomena in the International Labor Movement

By John Pepper

IN the series of new phenomenon which marked the course of the past year in the international labor movement a two-fold movement may be noted: on the one hand certain portions of the labor movement are impelled toward the right, on the other hand broad strata of the international labor movement begin to develop in the opposite direction, towards the left.

In generalizing these phenomenon it is necessary to point out that I will deal here only with general characteristics and will not go into details. I will deal chiefly with the new, hence the picture will be incomplete and in some respects it may even appear one-sided. The purpose of this article is not to give an analysis of Social Democracy or of the labor movement as a whole, but only an analysis of the new phenomena inside Social Democracy, inside the labor movement. It would be a distortion of proportions were we to draw our tactical conclusions only from a consideration of the new phenomena here cited without also considering the unmentioned, unchanged parts and factors of the labor movement.

I.

Phenomena of Right Development.

Numerous phenomenon indicate a definite right development of certain strata and forms

of the labor movement. This right development has as social basis a **strengthening of the labor aristocracy** in several countries, especially, however, in the United States of America.

The roots of this development lie:

1. In the **relative stabilization** of the European economic situation made possible chiefly by American export of capital.

The war time collapse obliterated the privileges of the labor aristocracy in Germany and in all conquered countries, reduced the numerical strength of this privileged stratum of the working class, while simultaneously millions of hitherto unorganized, unskilled, really proletarian masses were drawn into the trade unions and into political life. The development of recent years, however, brought with it a contrary tendency. Arm in arm with the stabilization of capitalism a re-creation of the labor aristocracy is in process. This is particularly clear in Germany where it is even fostered by the conscious efforts of the German capitalists. Large masses of unskilled workers have again deserted the trade unions and there is again a wide gulf between the wages of the labor aristocracy and of the actual proletariat. This re-creation of a labor aristocracy served as the social basis for the recuperation of Social Democracy in Germany.

2. In the mighty ascent of American imperialism, which, by means of capital export and the forcible and semi-forcible conquest of new market, has taken place particularly in the last two years. In this, we find the second root of the right development in the international labor movement. Never before in history has an imperialist country exported as much capital as America in the years 1924 and 1925. The whole world is a debtor to American imperialism—the whole world must work hard at the amortization of these debts and the payment of the interest. In addition the old war debts, which have long been but paper promises, are being funded one after another. Millions and hundreds of millions of dollars pour yearly from Europe, Asia, Central and South America to the United States as world-wide tribute to American imperialism. Never before was any imperialist country in the position to throw such large and such fat crumbs to its working class as a share in the booty, as the bourgeoisie of the United States. The war and the economic earthquake of the post-war crisis in 1921 shattered even the privileges of the American labor aristocracy, but in 1924-25 we experienced a restoration of the privileges of the labor aristocracy. The prohibition of immigration lends the American labor aristocracy a monopolistic position, a sort of high protective tariff for the commodity of labor power. The American labor aristocracy today receives incomparably the highest wages in the world.

In the last two years the results of this restoration of the special rights of the labor aristocracy became ever more clearly apparent:

1. A shrinkage of the trade unions to one-half.
2. Ebb of the labor party movement which in 1923 bore a real mass character.
3. The emergence of "company unions" as a mass phenomenon in 1924 and 1925.
4. Capitalist development of the trade unions thru the founding of labor banks and other forms of direct class collaboration.
5. The development of labor imperialism, of the "Monroe Doctrine of labor," the ideology of Pan-American labor imperialism which finds its crassest expression in the report of the American Federation of Labor at its last congress:

"Let us feel that the North American Continent—the United States and Canada together with our sister Republic Mexico—is our field, and that it is our intention to maintain our activity among the workers of this field. . . . For this reason we give the world the most serious warning of which we are capable that in the Western hemisphere we will voluntarily tolerate no movement of the 'Old World' to be forced upon the American workers. Just as the United States Government, under President Monroe, warned Europe against armed attacks, we just as emphatically warn against attacks by way of propaganda. The American Continents are for democracy. Then Pan-American Federation is the recognized International Labor Movement of the

American Continent. Thru this the American Republics express the aims and ideals of their working masses and the American peoples are determined that it shall remain so." (Retranslated from the German).

A number of historical conditions (first unrestricted free land, later the lack of a centralized government in the European sense and the deepening of the division in the working class between labor aristocracy and real proletariat due to national differences) fostered the development of the labor aristocracy so characteristic of the American working class already prior to the war. The labor aristocracy shattered by the economic crisis and the joint attack of the new centralized state power and the bourgeoisie has been able to revive because of the reckless tempo of imperialist development in the last two years. It is no accident, therefore, that the only real mass organization of the American workers, the American Federation of Labor, ruled by the labor aristocracy, stands outside and even to the right of the Second International.

The Third International is the representative of the general fundamental historical interests of the proletariat on a world scale.

The Second International is the political representative of the European labor aristocracy (even tho the overwhelming majority of its membership is composed of actual proletarians).

The American Federation of Labor, however, is the representative of the labor aristocracy of the labor aristocracy.

The Second International is the political expression of the fact that the European labor aristocracy shares the super-profits of the European bourgeoisie which are extorted from the colonies.

The American Federation of Labor with its home policy of class collaboration and its foreign policy of Pan-American imperialism is the political expression of the fact that the American labor aristocracy shares in American imperialism's super-profits, extorted not only out of the colonies and of the Central and South American semi-colonies, but also out of the labor of the European proletariat as a whole.

II.

Phenomena of the Left Development.

Ample, many-sided and colorful are the phenomena which show the left development of certain labor strata. There is a certain justification for characterizing this left development as a revival of the two and a half International sentiment.

We shall enumerate the most important of these facts and symptoms:

1. The allinace of the British and Russian proletariat. The Anglo-Russian committee for trade union unity is the organizational form of

this alliance. The affiliation of the Finnish and Norwegian trade unions to the unity committee are but further symptoms of the militancy as well as the mighty resonance of the unity movement in the trade unions of the entire world.

2. The workers' delegations to the U. S. S. R. It is surely one of the most significant signs of the times that the European workers are beginning to "discover" the Soviet Union. The success of the British Trade Union Delegation is significant in principle. The results of the German Workers' Delegation are affecting ever broader circles. A hundred thousand copies of the pamphlet "What 58 German Workers Saw in Soviet Russia," has been sold. In more than a thousand trade union and personnel meetings reports were rendered on the experience of the German Workers' Delegates.

The Czecho-Slovak, Swedish and Norwegian Workers' Delegations also had reflex mass effects. Even in the United States of America almost 200,000 workers formed committees for the sending of Workers' Delegations to the country of socialist construction and workers' rule.

3. The crystalization of a Left Wing. There is today hardly an important country in which severe clashes between right and left tendencies are not taking place inside the Social Democracy. The first years of the post-war period showed everywhere the split of the Social Democracy. With the progressing stabilization of capitalism, however, the Social Democracy also became stabilized. The Hamburg Congress in 1922 effected the unification of the Second and Two and a Half Internationals. But the unity exultation did not last long. Severe factional struggles are again shaking the entire structure of the international Social Democracy.

We shall enumerate the most important symptoms in the various countries:

Great Britain. The most noteworthy appearance of the crystallization of the left wing is to be found in Great Britain, in the country of the most conservative pre-war labor movement.

What are the most important signs?

a. The growing activity of the working class; since last autumn the trade union membership has been on the increase. The number of votes of the labor party has increased in all recent parliamentary by-elections and in local elections.

b. The inner cohesion, the feeling of solidarity within the working class is growing; important amalgamation moves are in process in the trade unions; strong tendencies prevail for the formation of the "Industrial Alliance"; there is a general slogan: "more power to the General Council."

c. A general militancy reigns among the working class; "Red Friday" registered the

peak of this militancy; the railway workers' agreement negotiated by Thomas met with stormy opposition (only 41 votes were cast in favor, among which were 15 paid employees of the union, as against 36 votes in opposition, the actual majority of the delegates).

d. The Trade Union Congress at Scarborough registered the victory of the left wing; nor is the defeat of the left wing at the Labor Party congress in Liverpool so serious if the voting record is analyzed, since in every delegation voting under unit rule there were strong minorities which favored the left policy.

e. The left wing is organizing in various forms: The minority movement in the trade unions grows steadily; the left wing press shoots up like mushrooms after a shower; the left wing is beginning to assume organized form also in the labor party.

f. Important alterations are in process in the workers' ideology; more and more the Socialist ideas permeate the proletariat which formerly did not go beyond the "trade union ideology"; the question of extra-parliamentary revolutionary force is discussed for weeks in the entire working class press.

Germany. The opposition in the Social Democracy has existed in Germany for some time. It centered chiefly in Hessen-Frankfurt and Saxony. But this local opposition grew to a nation-wide left wing as the reverse side of the Dawes' plan was revealed—mass unemployment and constant governmental crisis. The question of indemnifying the ruling houses, the big coalition, the effects of Locarno, and the workers' delegations to the U. S. S. R. have contributed mightily to the deepening and widening of this opposition left wing. This left wing, on a national scale, has declared itself against the coalition with the bourgeoisie. In its chief headquarters, Saxony, it has already gone one step further; it has already declared for a coalition with the Communists. Two big victories for this opposition, which are simultaneously also victories for the Communist Party of Germany, revealed the strengthening of the mass pressure of this left opposition. The official leadership of the Social Democracy was compelled to capitulate, under pressure of their own membership, on the questions of the big coalition and of the referendum on the expropriation of royalty. Gnashing their teeth the Social Democratic Party executive had to enlist the good offices of the trade unions in the referendum question in order to avoid (as a bourgeois paper wrote) having their supporters desert to the Communists not simply in battalions, but in whole armies.

France. French politics stand in the orbit of the financial crisis, the permanent governmental crisis and the colonial wars. The January party congress of the Socialist Party of

France was really nothing but the political reflection of these three crises. The party congress concluded with the victory of the left wing in the decisive question—the resolution opposing immediate participation in a cabinet dominated by the radical petty bourgeois parties was adopted by a vote of 1766 against 1331. Three tendencies are to be observed in the left wing: The Faure-Blum group which was ready to participate in a cabinet with a Socialist Party majority even tho the premier were a radical; the Compere-Morel group which, while willing to tolerate some radicals in a Socialist cabinet, demands in advance a free hand for measures beyond the parliamentary sphere; and the third group of Zyromski-Bracke which advocates an exclusively Socialist government and states a temporary proletarian dictatorship to be inevitable and that it is willing to fight in agreement with the Communist Party.

Poland. The January congress of the P. P. S. was featured by factional struggle. The opposition mustered not less than 40 per cent of the delegates. This is a significant sign of the radicalization of the Polish working masses, the more so since the P. P. S. already previously had been "cleansed" by a number of leftward splits. The question of the coalition government was the center of the struggles at the party congress.

Norway. Strong tendencies towards proletarian unity are manifest in the Norwegian labor movement, and this upon the basis of the revolutionary class struggle. Under the pressure of the revolutionary workers of whom fairly large numbers have remained in Tranmael's party despite the split, Tranmael was forced to issue the slogan for the "rallying of the working class." The trade union question also added renewed impetus to the unity slogan. Due to the old tradition of the Norwegian labor movement the development of the left wing assumes the organizational form of the creation of a labor party.

Czecho-Slovakia. The differentiation in the Social Democracy takes place here in an especially strange manner—upon a national basis. The Czech Social Democrats sit in the coalition government side by side with their "own" Czech bourgeoisie while the German Social Democrats, again in harmony with their "own" German bourgeoisie, chew on the bitter crusts of the opposition. The two Social Democratic camps combat one another more and more sharply as a "pro-government" right and an "anti-government" left wing.

Denmark. The Social Democracy wields governmental power here and as a counterbalance there emerges a strong opposition movement in the trade unions, which leads even to the splitting off of quite broad masses from the social democratically controlled Trade Union Federation.

Austria. The Social Democratic Party itself formed a part of the so-called left wing in the recent Marseilles congress of the Second International, yet also within this powerful mass party there emerge oppositional groups in Burgenland and also in the ranks of the youth.

Hungary. The pact concluded by the Social Democracy with Horthy and their simultaneous alliance with the bourgeois parliamentary opposition led to a split in the Social Democratic Party of Hungary, to the formation of a new left party also, however, to the crystallization of a new opposition within the Social Democracy at its last party congress.

America. The general tendency of the labor movement for the past two years has been towards the right. It would be a grave error however, to overlook phenomena which, especially in the last few months, herald tendencies of a left development. Of what do these symptoms consist?

- Advances and victories of the left wing in the needle trades where the Communist leadership has succeeded in crowding out the former Social Democratic leadership.
- Advances of the left wing in the miners' union.
- The great five-months' strike of the anthracite miners.
- The stiffening of the resistance movement of the textile workers.
- A certain revival of the labor party movement.

Further facts could be piled up but those mentioned will suffice to prove the existence in practically every country of the differentiation of the factional struggles of the development of a left wing. This left wing crystallization is quite a general phenomenon. But a source of error should be indicated immediately. There arises here the danger of too much generalization. The development must be studied entirely concretely in each single country. The left wing movement presents an entirely different aspect in the victorious countries from what it does in the vanquished, in the countries suffering new crises and in those in which the crises have already entered upon a second edition, in the countries where we have strong Communist Parties and in those where the Communist Parties are weak. The specific politico-economic situation of each country colors the political and organizational form and the maturity of the left movements.

4. **Communist election successes.** In three countries especially the Communists can show important election successes: in Belgium, Germany and in Czecho-Slovakia.

In the Belgian provincial elections (Nov. 8, 1925) the Social Democrats lost about 60,000 votes while the Communist Party of Belgium increased its vote of about 30 per cent.

Since the middle of 1924 the German Communists recorded a loss of votes in every election, but at the end of 1925 in the Berlin municipal elections, in the Prussian provincial elections, and in the South German Landtag elections the Communist Party could once more reckon with new successes whereas the Social Democracy declined.

The parliamentary election at the end of November, 1925, in Czecho-Slovakia, signified a complete victory for the Communists who mustered almost a million votes and a grievous defeat for the Social Democracy. Even the Berlin "Vorwaerts" was compelled to admit this defeat.

"The elections ended with a Socialist defeat. . . . The Communist Party, however, has grown very strong. . . . They (the Social Democrats) lost a round million of the 1,600,000 votes polled in 1920 for the most part to the benefit of the Communists. . . . This surely makes clear that the majority of the Czech proletariat is hostile to their former Coalition policy."

Thus we see the same picture in all three countries: Vote increases for the Communists at the expense of the Social Democrats.

5. **Attempts of the Social Democrats to make overtures to the Communists.** In recent times there have been constantly increasing attempts at overtures from Social Democrats of more or less left shadings. At times they approach the Soviet Union, but at other times directly the Third International. To cite only a few of these united front proposals:

Of all these overtures Otto Bauer's great speech made before the meeting of the Vienna Social Democratic Party functionaries on December 21, 1925, was echoed most widely. In this speech Otto Bauer stated approximately the following: 1. The Soviet Union has succeeded in reviving agriculture. 2. Tremendous progress has been made in the revival of Russian industry. 3. The standard of living of the working masses have undergone decided improvement. 4. The economic improvement gives the possibility of socio-political and cultural-political progress. 5. The working masses have faith in the Soviet regime. 6. He admits the success of Socialist reconstruction in the following words:

"Most important for us, as Socialists, is that now the hope arises that altho it may not be entirely proved yet, in a few years it may be proved that we can get along without capitalists. You realize how much Socialism would be strengthened in Europe if they would succeed there in proving this. We are not quite that far as yet. What prevails in Russia is as yet not Socialism. But it is likewise not capitalism; it is a country in a transition period; its economy contains very many capitalist elements but also very many socialistic ones!"

The international working class must make an alliance with the Soviet Union:

"Therefore it is the greatest interest of world Socialism that the tremendous experiment of the Rus-

sian revolution be not disturbed by hostile capitalist powers. Hence our attitude which we have ever maintained, and ever will, that the working class of all countries has the strongest interest in defending the Soviet Republic. No matter what it may be that separates us from the Bolsheviks, against capitalist hostility we must extend it our complete solidarity. We, Austrian Social Democrats, have always held to this, which explains also why we opposed in Marseilles the one-sided anti-Bolshevism of other Parties."

Another sign of approach—from Denmark. This effort originates, to be sure, from a not particularly important country but it is nevertheless interesting in that it reflects quite well an international attitude. The Social Democratic Reichstag Deputy, I. P. Nielsen, writes in the theoretical magazine of the Danish Social Democracy, "Socialisten":

"The young Russian Republic will receive a powerful support in the Social Democracy of the countries who for their part will consider themselves the defenders and promoters of the interests of the Socialist Republic. The old Social Democracies will come back to the correct plan and will gain rejuvenation for their aims from the Russian Workers' and Peasants' Republic."

And in conclusion:

"Just look at how all countries are over-run by the social plague of unemployment. . . . Not alone Denmark. . . . For this reason I do not believe, no matter how much we might perhaps desire, that we can avoid a radical transformation of the economic basis of society; the present sphere is too narrow to include all; it must be exploded. With this in view the rallying of the world-wide labor movement will be a gain."

The American Socialist, Norman Thomas, who is considered the successor of the aged Debs in the leadership of the American Socialist Party, writes (May 12, 1925,) in the "New Leader," central organ of the American Social Party concerning the causes of the split between the Communists and the Social Democrats, the mistakes of the Socialists in the trade union field and in their propaganda against the Russian revolution. He comes finally to this conclusion:

"One must not forget that the average worker would regard the collapse of the Russian experiment not merely as a collapse of Communism but also as a collapse of Socialism. And I would go further. I believe that in the present state of affairs it would be logically possible to form a united front between Socialists and Communists for the purpose of immediate demand campaigns in which each of the parties would retain their position on essential questions of philosophy and politics." (Retranslated from the German).

The most important symptoms of overture endeavors was demonstrated in the decision of the executive of the Independent Labour Party on January 1, 1926, in the British "New Leader." This decision goes further in that it seeks an approach not only to the Soviet Union but directly to the Third International. The decision consists of two parts: The first states that the Independent Labour Party will endeavor

to unite the Second and Third Internationals. It will raise this question at the next session of the Second International. It proposes that the Communists relegate to the rear the question of armed uprising and that one should concentrate on the struggle of combating capitalism and imperialism. The second part of the decision consists of two parts: The first states that the Independent Labour Party will endeavor cisions at any price in the Second International. It will no longer conceal its left wing attitude and thereby "a left wing will naturally emerge there (in the Second International), and a lively discussion of new ideas and new policies will be awakened thruout the entire International."

Two tendencies must be kept apart from one another in these reconciliation endeavors: The first tendency is the honest desire of the Social Democratic masses for the unity of the labor movement. The second tendency however, is the speculation of more or less left Social Democratic leaders who aim to prove thru such

reconciliation maneuvers that not they but the Communists are the foes of unity.

All these facts and events taken together are symptoms of a vitalization, differentiation and radicalization of certain portions of the international labor movement. The contours of a Third International sentiment are beginning to show themselves in certain parts of the working class. Under varying circumstances and under utterly different conditions there is resurrected the attitude of 1920 when the Independent Labour Party in Great Britain, the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany, dispatched their letters of interrogation and representatives to Moscow to negotiate on conditions of unification with the Third International. The significance of these symptoms should certainly not be overestimated; at the beginning of 1926 they are surely not as strong as at the end of 1920, but still less can we shut our eyes to the significance of these signs.

(Continued in May Issue.)



"There you are! He's yours again for five years!"