

# New Phenomena in the International Labor Movement

By John Pepper

(Continued from April issue.)

## III.

### The Roots of the Left Sentiment.

**THE** Two and a Half International attitude first became evident in the labor movement in the last years of the war and the first post-war years. As already mentioned, this trend reached its peak in 1920. The first appearance of the frost of relative capitalist stabilization nipped these extremely tender blossoms.

The roots of this evaporated Two and a Half International sentiment were the following:

1. The terrific economic collapse brought on by the world war, the inability of capitalism to satisfy the most elementary needs of the masses: No food! No clothes! No housing!
2. The disillusionment of the masses in the social patriotic policies of the Social Democracy.
3. The example of the young victorious Russian Revolution as an inexhaustible source of inspiration.

The roots of the new Two and a Half International sentiment are the following:

1. A number of economic crises in almost all of the important European countries. One must not lump together all these crisis phenomena. At least one distinction must be drawn: the crisis-type of Great Britain and France must be distinguished from that of Germany.
- To the first group there belong the victorious countries in which the post-war crisis became evident only in the last few years, not as in the vanquished central European countries. Even within this first type there are of course important concrete differences: In Great Britain, an industrial crisis; in France, a financial crisis of inflation. The British Empire is at present experiencing the second shock to its power. The first in the middle nineties, caused by the rise of the young German Empire, for the first time threatened the privileges of the British labor aristocracy and led to the foundation of the Labor Party. The second came in recent years thru the predominance of American imperialism and the autonomy of the Dominions, and this will lead to the formation of a mass Communist Party.

The German crisis-type might be called a post-rehabilitation crisis since it attacks countries which have already gone thru a certain stabilization. The crisis prevails in Germany,

where after a year of quiescence the reverse side of the Dawes' plan is now revealed. It prevails in Poland, where the first collapse followed upon an already stabilized valuta. It reigns in Austria and Hungary where celebrations were once held on the League of Nations stabilization.

Common to the countries of both types is permanent mass unemployment which rages, however, not only in these countries but in Sweden, Denmark, etc. as well. By way of change: No widespread unemployment in France, but instead inflation and high prices.

2. Disillusionment of the masses in the Social Democratic Coalition Governments. The bourgeois-Social Democratic governments have become an international phenomenon. Theory and practice of the Second International are equally under the sign of the coalition government policy. It is well-known that the theory was formulated by Karl Kautsky: The political form of transition from capitalism to Socialism is not the dictatorship of the proletariat, but the bourgeois-Social Democratic Coalition Government.

There is hardly a country in Europe in which the workers have not had experience with bourgeois-Social Democratic Coalition governments. In Germany the Social Democrats participated three times already in coalition governments: 1919, 1921, 1923 and at the end of 1925 they are conducting a big debate on the possibilities of renewed participation. In France we find a typically French subtle form of coalition government, i. e., a disguised form: The Social Democrats are not in the cabinet itself but participate in the left bloc and support the government from the outside. The Labor Party government in Great Britain was formally a purely "workers' government" of the Labor Party, but in reality it was a coalition with the liberals since as a minority government it could not exist a minute without the votes of the liberals in parliament. In Poland the P. P. S. is in a coalition government—and what a one—with the most reactionary elements of big landowners and capitalists. In Czecho-Slovakia the Social Democrats are in with the Czech parties of large landowners and the bourgeoisie against the working class and against the national minorities. Even tiny Denmark has the good fortune to possess a Social Democrat government. Similarly in Sweden there is one which in reality is

a coalition with the Populist Libertarians since it is dependent upon the patronage of this party's votes. In Belgium, the "power" is now held by a government of Social Democrats and clericals. In Hungary the Social Democratic ministers sat in the cabinet of the white terror and twice saved Horthy from destruction.

The working masses have had bitter experiences with these Social Democratic coalition governments, which neither consolidate the political power of the working class nor ensure real economic advantages to the proletariat.

3. The strengthening of the position of the U. S. S. R. The chronic unemployment, the permanent governmental crises when government follows upon government, increasingly demonstrate before ever growing masses the hopelessness of capitalist anarchy in Europe. At the same time, however, the workers turn with increasing hope to the perspective of Socialist construction in the Soviet Union. Coming with the first ebb of enthusiasm for the Russian revolution, the conditions in the Soviet Union during the period of Civil War and famine constituted the "terrible example" for Social Democratic agitation. These times are past however.

Kautsky's nursery tales about cannibalism in the Soviet Union have lost their punch. The entrenchment of the Workers' Republic is today the strongest asset in the accounts of the world revolution. The effect of the strengthening of the position of the U. S. S. R. may be divided into the following headings:

- (a) The rising standard of living of the Russian proletariat.
- (b) The success in the construction of Socialism.
- (c) The international recognition of the U. S. S. R.
- (d) In connection with the mass unemployment in Europe the hope of gaining the mighty fields and tremendous population of the Soviet Union as a possible market for industrial products. (This is particularly obvious in Great Britain and in the attitude of the Austrian co-operators.)

## IV.

### The Characteristics of the Left Wing.

1. The left attitude is an international phenomenon, but as yet it possesses no really international connections. In Marseilles, at the congress of the Second International, the distinction between right and left did not extend to the individual parties but entire countries fought one another as solid units.
2. This left trend has thus far not broken thru the organizational boundaries of the Second International. It remains entirely inside of the Second International, but it has already de-

veloped entirely original new organizational forms. The following forms might be cited:

- (a) The workers' delegations.
- (b) The Anglo-Russian Unity Committee.
- (c) The various unity committees and committees of action in the unions and in the factories.
- (d) The Labor Party form which really constitutes a special form of united front organization.
- (e) The interesting form of the minority movement.

3. In almost every country these left wing movements reveal a hostile attitude towards the "native" Communists, but they already manifest a cordial spirit towards the Russian trade unions or towards the Soviet Union and partially also towards the Third International. This represents a quite characteristic feature. One might say: The further away the Communist the better looking he is to the confused sentiments of these half-way men.

4. In all these movements one must sharply differentiate between leaders and working masses. Naturally there are exceptions but in most cases these left leaders are extremely vacillating figures, very uncertain quantities. Very often we also meet the "commandeered" type of left leader who is simply assigned by the official party executive to the task of leading, i. e., misleading, this left movement. This is the Ebert method employed in the January strike in Germany: "to put oneself at the head of the movement better to be able to choke it off." The best examples are furnished in the party congress of the P. P. S. or of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party. But of course, in the face of these commandeered leaders one must not forget the masses of honest Social Democratic workers in this opposition. Extremely typical is the statement made at the congress of the French Socialist Party by Reviere, a worker out of the factory: "We speak here in the name of the dues paying cattle" These workers already are conscious that they are oppressed by the leadership of their own party.

5. The social basis of the left sentiment is everywhere in the most proletarian centers. In Germany, the opposition is strongest in Saxony, which today represents one-fifth of the membership of the Social Democratic Party of Germany. Only 11 per cent of the Saxon toilers are engaged in agriculture. At the congress of the P. P. S. the oppositional delegates came from the industrial districts of Dombrovo, Lodz, and Radom. In France the North and the Seine organizations support the left wing.

6. The central question of conflict in all these struggles between the right and left wing is the question of the coalition government or the "gradualness" of the class struggle. It is no

accident that simultaneously in a whole series of Social Democratic Parties the question of participation in bourgeois governments is the central point of dispute. The mighty storm of protest of the left Social Democratic workers in Germany against the big coalition, the party congresses of the P. P. S., of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party and of the Socialist Party of France which because of this question were convened twice within a few months—all turn around the question of the coalition government. When we study all these party congresses, discussions, and resolutions, we see that the problem of the coalition government cannot be disposed of as a mere product of intrigue betrayals of the reformist leadership. Of course, the despicable treason of the Social Democratic leadership plays a big role in the origin of the traitorous coalition policy. But we cannot content ourselves with this statement. It is an undeniable fact that the mass sentiment of the Social Democratic working masses also plays a role in the forming of coalition governments. The trend of thought of these Social Democratic working masses must be closely studied if they are to be combated successfully.

What are the chief forms of these trends of thought, these arguments for a coalition government?

(a) The "fear" of the reaction. "If we do not take over the government the reaction will come." In France they call it the "black man"—"Bloc National"; in Germany "Bürgerblock"; in other countries, fascism. In Poland, Daszinski declaims with a remnant of his old pathos: "We had to form the coalition government because Sikorski wanted to send his regiments to Warsaw."

(b) The defense of the new national states. This trend of thought plays a big role chiefly in Czecho-Slovakia and Poland. Both are countries where recollections of a century of Russian czarist or Austrian Hapsburgian oppression are still fresh and where strong so-called "anti-government" national minicrities exist, as in Poland (the White Russians and Ukrainians) and in Czecho-Slovakia (the Slovaks, Hungarians and Germans). The Social Democratic workers say: Our young national state is very weak and might easily be destroyed. For this reason we must enter a coalition government with our "own" bourgeoisie against the "anti-government" nationalities.

(c) We must get "something," something "immediate," something "tangible" for the working class. This is the third argument for the coalition government. Unemployment increases, the masses starve, they say to themselves: "When our leaders are in the government perhaps a crumb will also fall to our share." Particularly significant are the statements of the co-operators and trade unionists at the French Socialist Party Congress.

(d) "If we assume power alone we will be unable to hold it and then will come the White Terror." This is the fourth argument for a coalition government in the heads of the Social Democratic workers. Italy, where after the seizure of the factories came fascism, and Hungary, where the Soviet dictatorship was replaced by the Horthy regime—these serve especially as "terrifying" examples.

\*7. The question of the unity of the working class is also one of the most important points of conflict between the right and left wings.

8. Struggle or surrender in economic demands, in wage questions and strikes, constitutes another disputed point.

9. The attitude towards Soviet Russia is more and more strongly pushed to the foreground in recent times as a contested question.

10. The question of pacifist illusions (League of Nations, Locarno, Dawes' Pact) played an important role not only at the Marseilles congress but also in practically every country.

11. The conflict between the policy of support for the revolution of the colonial peoples and the imperialist attitude of the labor aristocracy is also on the agenda.

All these oppositional movements show a certain resurrection of the revolutionary phrase. As is known the by-gone Two and a Half International united the slogan of the proletarian dictatorship with the illusions of parliamentarism. The demand of the German Independents "the Soviet must be anchored in the constitution" is well known. The word "revolution" which in recent years it was no longer polite to mention in well-bred Social Democratic circles has been restored to honor in the party congresses of the Socialist Party of France, in the P. P. S. and in the German left Social Democratic press. In Poland the Radom delegate cries: "The revolution will come to us by itself and conquer by force." In Germany the left Social Democratic "Plauener Volkstimme" writes: "Revolutions are not made with grimaces." Compare Morel's speech at the January congress of the French Socialists as cited by "Humanite" as follows:

"We knew quite well what measures a Social Democratic government should undertake in the first hours of its power. It could do nothing within the sphere of parliamentarism. . . . No illusions; there are far too many in our ranks who do not see any further than parliament. We are there to defend the working masses and as long as capitalism reigns the working class will never get its due."

He was interrupted: "Go and join the Communist Party."

"Ha," he replied, "how thoroly it must have been forgotten in this party what socialism really is if it is no longer possible to speak at its congress as I do."

And he concluded:

" . . . A further task is to prepare for proletarian unity on the trade union and political field."

And Renaudel indignantly cites the speech by Maurin from the "l'Étincelle": "The split was poorly executed in Tours." In other words they should not have separated from the left (from the Communist) but from the right, from the opportunists.

All these phenomena have of course, only a qualified value. Their presentation must naturally emphasize the new even if but to be able to combat the conservative inclinations in our ranks that sometimes underestimate the new.

It was not the task of this analysis to present the old, the known, the opportunist, the coun-

ter-revolutionary in the Social Democracy. In the final appraisal of these new phenomena, however, one must maintain the correct proportions. One must not forget for one minute that Social Democracy is and remains the ideology and organization of opportunism, that it is the representative not of the interests of the proletariat, but of those of the labor aristocracy. Still less can one succumb to the illusion that international Social Democracy, despite this left gesture, will ever be able to develop into a revolutionary party. The leader of the proletarian revolution can only be the Communist Party and the investigation of all left sentiments and left wings of the Social Democracy must be undertaken from the viewpoint of the development of the Communist Parties.

