

Against the Labor Party (Militant Reformism) in the U. S. A.

By J. ZACK

IN the decade just prior to the World War, when the struggle of the petty bourgeoisie in city and country against the grasping hand of monopoly came to a turning point, this section of the population reinforced by considerable groups of skilled workers, rebelled against the two major capitalist parties, particularly against the Republican Party, and formed their own organizations, some to bore from within and capture the local party machinery of the old parties (non-partisan leagues) in the Western agrarian states. The socialist movement of the time with all its reformism was too revolutionary for these elements who, although impatient with the empty reformist promises of the capitalist party politicians, did not want to subscribe to a movement which at least theoretically was standing for the abolition of the capitalist system. The high point of this type of militant reformist movements before the war was the Bull Moose Progressives whom Theodore Roosevelt, Monroe Doctrine imperialist par excellence, later president of the U. S. A., led into safe capitalist channels.

During the high tide of anti-war sentiment, before the entry of the U. S. A. into the world war, these petty bourgeois radical movements were quite popular and achieved in their territories considerable successes, so did the Socialist Party, only to go over to the Government's side as soon as war was declared.

With the conclusion of the armistice, the war boom began to fade out, the capitalists were out to deflate labor in the city and on the countryside, a particularly severe agricultural crisis developed, six million were thrown out of work in industry. The Russian Revolution had its powerful effect also in the U. S. A. Huge mass strikes took place, general strikes in several cities, a Communist Party was formed, the government suppressed it, arresting 70,000 in night raids, out of it all by the time of the 1924 presidential election (which took place when industry was again stabilized on a peace basis) arose the Farmer Labor Party movement, and finally the LaFollette middle-class movement.

About this time, that is, at the end of 1923, Comrade Pepper came to the U. S. A.; his ambition was to help our Party become a mass Party, a very worthy ambition indeed, but he had, may I say without insult to the great Corsican, "Napoleonic" ideas as to

how to do it, like all immigrants that absorb the "American" spirit of getting rich quickly. He wanted to do it, so to say, with a few Napoleonic master strokes. I am sure that up till today he blames the Comintern for his failure.

His idea was that the Communist Party could join the LaFollette movement, bore from within, this big opposition stream acting as a ginger group from within. *The idea was to force the LaFollette movement, which was essentially a petty-bourgeois movement within the capitalist parties, into forming a third party in opposition to the old capitalist parties* and then boring from within to split off the left labor elements, then out of these elements form a farmer-labor party from which was to come the Communist Party—a four-wheel theory. Pepper ascribed to the petty bourgeoisie in the U. S. A. a revolutionary role. He spoke in his articles about a "LaFollette Revolution." He theorized about the great differences between the capitalists of the finishing industry and the raw material industry, and as Henry Ford, the automobile manufacturer, was wavering, Pepper openly in the Party press expressed the desirability of Ford joining the LaFollette movement.

After Pepper had the Party committed to LaFollettism, his policy was overruled by the Comintern, and thus the Party was saved from this petty-bourgeois swamp. When this Kuomintang theory for the U. S. A. was overruled he stuck to the theory on a three-wheel basis, that is, form a Farmer-Labor Party, and then, out of its left wing, a mass Communist Party. This was the essence of the famous August, 1924 thesis of Pepper. Finally, the Comintern overruled this theory as well, that is, the theory of Communists forming a two-class party in the U. S., but the theory of a reformist Labor-Party minus farmers, to be formed by the Communists and based on the more exploited and therefore militant section of the skilled unions, remained until the Sixth Congress, where the policy was changed to the slogan of "*Labor Party from below*," to be based upon the unorganized. Such is the history of this exceptional theory. Before going more into the essence of this question, I will add that in practice, during the last five years, this policy has proven to be a complete failure. In spite of all our efforts, it was impossible to bring life into this theory. There is no mass Labor Party movement today, and the little there is, is in agrarian states, controlled by middle classes and bitterly hostile to the revolutionary proletariat.

WHY THE THEORY IS WRONG

Pepper's theory presupposes that at this stage of imperialism we must go through mechanically (in a shorter time as he claims)

with a development similar to Great Britain, plus that we should participate in the formation of a Liberal Party first. Then labor would emancipate itself, take the middle and poorer farmers along and form a Farmer-Labor Party, and as in England, following Lenin's idea, the Communists were working from within the Labor Party, why in the U. S. should they not form one also, in order to work from within.

Pepper in conceiving this fantastic mechanical transplantation of European experience just forgot (if he ever knew) Marx and Lenin completely, not because there is not the possibility of so-called Liberal Parties being formed by the bourgeoisie, but by the fact that under the high capitalist development in the U. S. A. with its gigantic proletariat (after the Russian Proletarian Revolution) such a party will be from the very outset a Party that will serve the purpose of fascizing the state. It will be the most aggressive force against the proletariat and a product of the struggle against it, and not a revolutionary factor as Pepper conceived.

The incorrectness of this was already apparent with sufficient clearness for anyone who cared to see it, even in 1924. In the U. S. A., due to its high development, we have an enormous stratum of what I would call "new petty-bourgeoisie," that is, persons who, according to their income are higher paid than even those of the skilled workers, but below those of the capitalists, can be placed in that category. This stratum numbers about six million, but contrary to the petty-bourgeoisie in the classic sense, who are independent producers or merchants, and therefore are interested in the struggle against monopoly, this new petty-bourgeoisie, that is, petty officials in the production process, from skilled assistant foreman to the so-called salaried employees, technicians, professional men, etc., then we have the same independent vendors of the products of the trusts, petty real estate men, and all kinds of semi-independent dispensers of services, as well as all manner of petty officials in the public services, etc., etc., are directly interested in the favorable development of the trusts *and are not against them in principle*. Then we have the labor aristocracy of about four and a half million, about forty per cent of whom are organized, and who are bourgeoisified ideologically and see their future in the progress of monopoly.

But even the petty-bourgeoisie and middle classes who are independent producers and distributors, under the pressure of the cut-throat competition characteristic of monopoly development, and although *opposing monopoly in principle*, are, in order to survive, intensifying the exploitation of the workers they employ and fear and fight the proletariat just as viciously and even worse than

the monopoly officials themselves. In this category also comes a large stratum of more or less well-to-do farmers. I leave it now to the reader to draw his own conclusion as to what kind of Liberal Party this would be, very liberal indeed, in the application of fascist methods against the working class.

We see then that the "vigorous" development of American capitalism has produced a big stratum of imperialist petty-bourgeoisie and labor aristocracy, which plays its specific role against the proletariat whenever a critical situation arises.

* * *

I have stressed the role of these various petty-bourgeois groups in relation to the working class and particularly towards revolutionary tendencies. There are of course differences amongst them based on economic interest. All these petty-bourgeois stratum want a greater share of surplus profit from monopoly capital, others are opposed to monopoly in principle, etc. Whenever there is a depression or economic crisis, these differences manifest themselves more clearly amongst them, and tend to intensify the opposition tendencies, and what is more important, the crisis stirs the deep layers of semi-skilled and unskilled and the poor farmers, and especially oppressed nationalities like the Negroes. In such an event, these opposition moods which ordinarily express themselves and simmer within the old capitalist parties, particularly the Democrats, become more militant and take one step outside of the capitalist parties. This manifests itself by the putting up of independent presidential or local candidates. Such was the Roosevelt Bull Moose, the LaFollette movement, etc., etc. The new petty-bourgeoisie and imperialist labor aristocracy gets a hold of these movements, very often obtains certain concessions from big capital, that is, it utilizes the masses to press out concessions for itself, then betraying the interests of these masses it leads them back into safe capitalist channels. The organized labor aristocracy in such events transplants the strike-breaking methods of its bureaucracy and its class collaboration policy to the political field.

What Pepper failed to notice altogether blinded by his theory about the revolutionary role of the petty-bourgeoisie, is that a considerable section of the opposition movement of the petty-bourgeoisie and labor aristocracy already then assumed openly fascist forms, the Ku Klux Klan which then swept through various states and grew very rapidly. The American Legion (ex-soldiers) and numerous similar local organizations, who committed many murders of militant labor organizers, were manifestations on a national scale against the gigantic strikes and labor unrest then taking place.

These organizations were dissatisfied with the slow tempo of the old parties. They wanted *for a price* a more vigorous policy against the workers and for that purpose they were boring from within the old parties in the service of big capital. The smashing of labor was what they considered as the proper solution of the crisis.

The working class then had no revolutionary leadership and the rapid stabilization and liquidation of the crisis and the post-war "prosperity" boom arrested the vigorous development of these new tendencies. *The role of the new petty-bourgeoisie was, however, the most significant new sign of the times and not the "LaFollette Revolution."*

(To be continued)