

# DeLeon and Roots of American Communism

by Herbert Zam

On the occasion of the 78th birthday of Daniel DeLeon, (DeLeon was born on Dec. 14, 1862 on Curacao Island near Venezuela) the Socialist Labor party declared: "As year after year passes by, the great and powerful figure of DeLeon looms larger and higher on the horizon." An examination of the present literature of the Communist Party leads one to the conclusion that this statement of the S. L. P. is justified at least by the fact that DeLeon seems to be acquiring followers in the ranks of the Communists. Some time ago the *Revolutionary Age* declared that the present Party and Comintern leaderships have abandoned Leninist tactics in the trade union field in favor of DeLeonism. Not only has this estimate proven true, but it must be said that along the entire front, the official leaders of the Comintern and of the American Party are joining in the adulation of DeLeon which has up to now been the sole monopoly, and incidentally, the sole stock in trade, of the sectarian Socialist Labor party. It is of course no accident that the sudden discovery of the 'revolutionary' virtues of DeLeon should be made at this time. The whole course of the Party leadership today is a departure from the principles of Leninist strategy, in the direction of its direct opposite, DeLeonist sectarianism. No wonder that K. Marmor, writing in the *Freiheit* on this subject, declares that "the real followers of Daniel DeLeon are today no longer in the ranks of the Socialist Labor party but in the Communist Party." This is also the main theme of two articles by L. G. Raisky (Red Professor) which appeared in the September and October numbers of the *Communist*. (A note informs us that these articles are translated from vol. 2 of *Problems of Marxism!*)

Let us examine the general content of these articles and see whether the estimate made therein of DeLeon and DeLeonism are compatible with adherence to Leninism.

\*\*\*

Comrade Raisky's main theme is that Daniel DeLeon was a true Marxist and an inveterate enemy of opportunism in all its forms. "DeLeon," he declares, "proclaimed a merciless war upon reformism." "DeLeon carried out a tremendous work in cleaning the Augean stables of the trade union movement (of reformism)." . . . DeLeon's struggle against organizational opportunism was closely connected with his struggle against opportunism in the economic and political domains." To Comrade Raisky, Hillquit and Gompers were the sole representatives of opportunism in the United States. Any one who fought against them was *ipso facto* a revolutionist. It is absolutely true that DeLeon carried on an unceasing struggle against reformists of the type of Hillquit, Berger and Gompers. But did he do it with the weapons of revolutionary activity and organization? He did not! For the open opportunism of Hillquit and Berger he substituted a kind of opportunist sectarianism which occasionally was accompanied by "orthodox" Marxist phraseology. Comrade Raisky becomes enamoured of this phraseology and fails absolutely to see the opportunism inherent in the entire system of DeLeon. Indeed, DeLeon was against all "reforms" but in reforms, he included all immediate demands. In 1900, the Socialist Labor party eliminated all immediate demands (the "tapeworm", as they called it) from its platform and since then has had only this one demand in its platform: "The complete surrender of the capitalist class." Today, following in the footsteps of DeLeon, the S. L. P. attacks the Communist platform as "opportunist" because it contains immediate demands! Perhaps this is a revolutionary virtue which we should learn from DeLeon, but we would rather agree with Lenin that immediate demands are a means of mobilizing the working class to revolutionary action. DeLeon believes that he could teach the workers with words, but Lenin taught us

that workers learn primarily through their own experience. The present-day followers of DeLeon would have us think the first view to be revolutionary and the second reformist.

\*\*\*

The test of the revolutionary character of an organization or individual lies not in its ability to produce revolutionary theories or phrases, or even to write learned dissertations on economic questions, but in its ability to rally the non-revolutionary masses for the carrying out of these revolutionary theories and phrases. By this test must we judge DeLeon and the S. L. P. It is sufficient merely to state the fact that in the last thirty years, fifteen of them under the leadership of DeLeon, the name of the S. L. P. has not been connected with a single outstanding struggle of the workers, with not a single historical revolutionary event. How seriously can such a party be taken as a revolutionary force, despite all its revolutionary phraseology?

The Socialist party, on the other hand, which Comrade Raisky waves aside as unimportant, and condemns as "reformist" because he considers it the party of Hillquit and Berger, is connected with numerous outstanding and heroic struggles of the American workers. How does Comrade Raisky account for that? Just as he sees only the revolutionary phraseology of DeLeon but not his deep opportunism, so also he sees in the S. P. only the Hillquits and Berbers, and fails to see the revolutionary workers, who while opposed to Hillquit's opportunism are none the less repelled by DeLeon's scholasticism. Raisky therefore considers that the SP and the SLP represent respectively the reformist and revolutionary concentrations in the American Socialist movement. He says: "DeLeon's determination to convert the Party (S. L. P.-H. Z.) into revolutionary militant vanguard of the proletariat met with resistance within the party, which led at the end of the century to a split between the revolu-

tionary and opportunist elements in American socialism". Besides mistating the causes of the split, Comrade Raisky is absolutely wrong as to its consequences. Any one who is acquainted with the development of Communism in America will recognize this even without making a deep analysis of the differences between the SP and the SLP. For it was not the "revolutionary" SLP but the "reformist" SP that gave birth to the Communist movement. The SP produced Hillquit and Berger, but it also produced Debs and Ruthenberg and Haywood. The SLP, on the other hand, produced only the scholastic prototypes of Hillquit and Berger, Arnold Peterson and Olive Johnson, than whom there are no greater anti-Communists. Raisky further states that DeLeon "trained valuable comrades for the Communist movement." Let him name a single outstanding Communist in America who had his training in the S. L. P.

In the structural difference between the S.P. and S.L.P. Raisky sees an expression of their political differences. This difference, does in fact exist, but it expresses exactly, the opposite of what our Red professor sees. The looseness of and lack of discipline in the SP made it possible for a revolutionary wing to develop within it, and to secure leadership over the mass of its members, which led to the establishment of various left wing groupings and papers, and finally to the original left wing which became the Communist Party. But the strictly disciplined and centralized SLP made impossible such a development. On the contrary, every new tendency in the SLP was crushed with a ruthless hand, and expulsions became a by-word. The discipline and centralization were that of Jesuitism and not those of Bolshevism, which permits the greatest inner-Party democracy coupled with the firmest unity in action. In the SLP there abounded "unity" of belief but no action.

(Two more articles in the series: "Lenin or DeLeon" by Herbert Zam will appear in the *Revolutionary Age*)

## REVOLT IN FRATERNAL SOCIETIES

By Frank Vratarić

What the present policies of the Communist Party really mean in the workers organizations is shown by what the Party officials are trying to accomplish in the Croatian Fraternal Union, (HBZ), a Croatian workers fraternal society. The present leadership of the Party is openly working in the direction of a split of the HBZ, with the objective of "uniting" the split part of the HBZ with fragments of other fraternal societies (Jewish, Lithuanian, Russian, etc.) thus making "one big Communist fraternal society" (the International Workers Order).

In order to be able to accomplish this splitting purpose, the Party leaders set to work to "reorganize" the Progressive Workers Block (the Party-led left wing of the HBZ) into a "Left Wing Block". The Party bureaucrats realized that there would be found plenty of left wing and Communist workers who would resist the splitting course of the Party; it was therefore necessary to "clean them out." Hence the "reorganization" of the Progressive Block.

### Revolt In Detroit

The biggest local of the HBZ is Local 351, Detroit. Here the struggle broke out first of all. In Detroit twelve workers were expelled from the Progressive Block (now the Left Wing Block). These twelve workers came out with a declaration that was printed and widely distributed. Because this declaration of a small group of workers and because the matter first appeared as a local matter, there are some shortcomings to register in this declaration. The declaration, for example, does not sufficiently point out the role of the reactionary and fascist leaders of the

traditions of the struggle against the reactionaries in this fraternal society, to call upon the workers to unite in the struggle against the reactionaries inside the organization. This job is a difficult one but it absolutely necessary. Only those who are tired of the teachings of Lenin will take up the policy of split. It is up to us to take up the fight against the reactionaries on the one hand and against any attempts to split the HBZ and other fraternal organizations on the other.

### Why Such Modesty?

In the *Militant* of November 15, Max Shactman (in the article "The A F of L Convention and the Elections") engages in some gentle self-criticism. After analyzing the actual situation and contrasting it with the third-period phantasies of the Communist Party leadership, he declares:

"To a moderate extent, the Left Opposition shared this error in the past. That is, it proceeded from the indisputable fact that the premises exist for a deep-going radicalization of the workers and drew the conclusions that the process was well under way."

But why so modest, Max? Why don't you tell us that the "revolutionary wave" hallucinations first saw the light in this country in the original and fundamental platform of the Trotskyites, the "Right Danger in the American Party," published in the first few numbers of the *Militant*? How can we forget the "wide-spread