

Opportunism and Dualism

by Herbert Zam

The Socialist Struggle in the Trade Unions

In the 90's, amidst a severe crisis and deep unrest in the ranks of the workers, a group of Socialists, members of the SLP, under the leadership of T. J. Morgan, made an intensive drive to place the American Federation of Labor on record in favor of Socialism. This movement made tremendous headway and swept the unions. Gompers himself was instructed by his union to vote for the proposal at the A. F. of L. convention. There is no doubt whatsoever that the overwhelming majority of the members of the A. F. of L. were in favor of the proposal, but due to the control of the officials and the bad organization of the Socialists, the question was sidetracked, and finally declared defeated by a small majority. During the entire campaign, De Leon, in control of the SLP and its press, did not by a single word or act support this work which was being carried on by members of his own Party. The results were a positive proof of the necessity and possibility for working in the existing unions: they were a striking argument against DeLeon's pet theories of dual unionism. He therefore decided to cut the Gordian knot with one blow, and in 1896 he organized the Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance (ST & LA) as a new "revolutionary" trade union center, which would immediately proceed to do everything the A.F.L. had failed to do, from organizing the unorganized to overthrowing capitalism. Speaking approvingly of this action, Comrade Rasky declares that American conditions "in some cases make inevitable the policy of dual unionism," and adds that "in recent years the development of the labor movement in U. S. inevitably led to the formation of new unions . . . which broke with the AFL and joined the Profintern . . . At the beginning of September of this year (1929) a national convention was held in the United States which created a new trade union center to lead those organizations which adhere to the platform of class struggle." Thus Comrade Rasky himself draws the deadly parallel between the DeLeonist sectarian course and today's sectarian Party line. History repeats itself indeed. When DeLeon organized the ST & LA it was a deep tragedy, for it separated the revolutionary workers from the conservative backward workers and made much more difficult the task of revolutionizing them. But the organization of the TUUL and the whole series of paper "industrial unions" was nothing but a farce because it had no basis whatever in existing conditions and no support among the workers. Comrade Marmor praises DeLeon's sectarianism even more highly and pictures him as having foreseen thirty years ago that the AFL was made up of "company unions." In spite of all this praise, Comrade Rasky is compelled to admit that after several years of existence the ST & LA had only 1400 members! What wonderful revolutionary strategy these figures indicate!

Split After Split!

It is over trade union policies, revolving around the ST & LA, that the SLP in 1900 split into two almost equal parts, one of which later became a part of the SP.

In 1905 the IWW was organized, and DeLeon joined with his dwindling ST & LA. This marriage did not last long, for in 1907 DeLeon, after trying vainly to capture the IWW, led his stalwarts out and again organized a "new" and "truly revolutionary" center, the Workers International Industrial Union. Incidentally this action brought about another split in the SLP. Perhaps Comrade Rasky will again say that this was a division between revolutionists and reformists! We shall see.

If De Leon split with Hillquit because he was too opportunist, then he split with the IWW because it was too revolutionary. Altho a good deal of the struggle was over the question of politics, specifically whether the IWW need participate or believe in politics, in actuality the issue was much deeper. DeLeon himself later explained that he split from the IWW because it had become an organization believing in "sabotage, direct action and violence". Even if DeLeon were right and the IWW wrong on the issue, that was no issue on which to split an economic labor organization, which in its essence, in spite of many and serious shortcomings, was revolutionary. It is another indication of DeLeon's inherent sectarianism and opportunism. DeLeon's organization (the WIU) earned for itself a quiet and all-embracing obscurity, while the IWW passed thru fifteen years of history-making existence, during which period its activity on behalf of the American workers made its very name anathema to capitalism. History has passed judgment on the "revolutionary" nature of DeLeon's theories and organization.

Politics and Parliamentarism

A discussion on the tasks of the IWW was carried on in the *Daily People*, edited by DeLeon, in which members of the SLP participated. The most brilliant presentation of the case of the "direct actionists" was made by Arturo Giovannitti, in the terse paragraphs:

can we believe that even with rigid logic, and with the fear of revolutionary organization could convince the master we itself up into the hands of a class that knows no

Christian charity and will not commute the death sentence of capitalism? Are we then to understand that capitalism will commit suicide . . . ? Is there an example in history that can justify such a sweet dream of peace and love?

"It is then by main force and thru violence only that we can transform society, but collective, organized violence, not as it is now in Russia, but as it was in this country fifty years ago. It is not a conspiracy but an open and loyal fight, not an assault but a regular duck, and it will not be a riotous outbreak but a good and proper civil war."

To which DeLeon answered:

"Not everything that capitalism has brought about is to be rejected. Among the valuable things that capitalism has introduced is the idea of peaceful methods for settling disputes." DeLeon then proceeded to praise courts and the ballot. "Political agitation . . . places the revolution abreast of civilized and intelligent methods—civilized because they offer a chance to a peaceful solution . . ." (Emphasis mine—H.Z.)

And further: *"Political action is the civilized, because it is the peaceful method of social debate . . ." "The IWW 'touches the class struggle' because it plants itself upon the non-Russian, that is, upon the civilized principle of solving social difficulties" . . . and so on . . . surrounding with an idyllic halo the "peacefulness" of capitalism and the possibility of accomplishing the proletarian revolution "peacefully." To allay any suspicions lest DeLeon used "political action" in the sense we use it today, he explained that:*

"Political Action" is a purely technical expression. It means the peaceful trial of strength in social issues. As such, the term is generic. It embraces a number of things, that is, all the things necessary for its realization. It embraces primaries; conventions, or any other established method for the nomination of candidates for office in the "political", that is, the class rule government; campaigning, that is, agitation in favor of the principles and of course, the candidates of the party; voting (not private voting) but voting in the same place where the opponents vote; finally as a consequence, "parliamentary activity."

Let those who consider DeLeon the Lenin of America and even a forerunner of Lenin, who "anticipated some elements of the Soviet system,"

explain the revolutionary nature of these beliefs of DeLeon as to how to bring about the revolution. Let them explain how these beliefs made DeLeon an "opponent of parliamentary cretinism." They will no doubt turn to DeLeon's dissertations on "force" and show that he favored it under "certain circumstances." That would indeed be enlightening. Here is how DeLeon believed in force, as he himself declared:

"The SLP ballot demands the unconditional surrender of the Capitalist Class. The SLP accordingly preaches the revolution, touches the revolution, and thereby enables the recruiting and organizing of the physical force element requisite to enforce the revolution. The SLP does all this, including the latter, because it strikes the posture of holding the ruling class to the civilized method of a peaceful trial of strength. It organizes itself with the requisite physical force in case its defeated adversary should resort to the barbarian's way of enforcing his will. The civilized man answers force; the barbarian begins with force."

We thus see that DeLeon's so-called belief in the use of force was the same as Hillquit's, that is, the "right" to defend the revolution by force after it had been peacefully voted in. Is there a single reformist Socialist throat the world who does not shout to the skies that he believes in "defending the revolution." DeLeon was well answered by the revolutionary syndicalists of his time, who told him that he proposed to use only the weapons which the capitalist class permits the workers and wants the workers to use, knowing that with those weapons alone the revolution is impossible of attainment. It is of no further importance to show that even DeLeon's "force" was subject to his own peculiar interpretation, namely "industrial force," as against military force, which he went into great detail to prove useless and impossible. This worship by DeLeon of the "civilized" method of "social debate" (that is of class struggle) made it absolutely impossible for him to work with any part of the working class which developed other methods of struggle, and only deepened his sectarianism.

So in 1907, the "revolutionary" DeLeon, who was carrying on the "inveterate struggle" against opportunism, expelled from the SLP those who believed in "sabotage, direct action and violence," showing the way to the Hillquits in the SP who did the same in 1912—five years later!

WHAT ABOUT LOCAL TEN?

By L. A.

The general rise of the progressive movement within the locals of the I. L. G. W. U. has had an effect also on the sentiment of the membership of Local No. 10 (cutters). At the time when the largest locals were under the influence of the left movement, Local No. 10 was the only large local that kept up the old reactionary policies. Naturally it couldn't be expected that a local with such a history and tradition should immediately become very much affected by the revival of the progressive movement of other locals. Yet local No. 10 shows some good signs of a beginning.

The Situation in Local 10

The general crisis that threw out millions of workers from their jobs had its effect also on the needle industries in general and on the cloak and dress industry in particular. The reduced purchasing power of the broad masses on one hand and rationalization and speed-up system in the cloak and dress industry on the other, brought a state of conditions where hundreds if not thousands of cloak and dress cutters can't find work for a few days a week to keep their families from starvation. And at the height of the season which is the hope of every unemployed cutter to make a few months and cover up the lost time of slack, even then, you can find hundreds of cutters going around idle while the more lucky ones find work for a few weeks to "cover up" lost time of unemployment.

What Does the Administration Do?

What does the administration of Local No. 10 do to meet these conditions? Does it make any attempt to help the cutters in this time of distress? Nothing of the kind. At the time when thousands of cutters are running from one corner to another to find a friend that might help them find a few days work, there are cutters that work overtime in so-called union shops. Overtime is legalized at a time when so many cutters can't find work to pay up their dues and taxes in the union. Many conservative unions speak up for a six hour day to eliminate unemployment in their industries and we have a point in the agreement allowing workers to work Saturdays in the season in spite of the fact that not all the cutters have jobs. The administration of Local No. 10 does not make any attempt to eliminate these evils, leaving these chaotic conditions to the members to brood over.

What Do the Members Think?

And the members? What do the members of the local think about these conditions. It is enough to pass the two market corners to understand what the members think of their conditions and of a leadership that does not care about the well being of its

members, as long as they get their dues and taxes collected. It is enough to participate in these discussions to find out that if a group of militant cutters would organize for progressive action in Local No. 10 good results could be reached within a short period of time.

The Possibilities for Progressive Action

Is there a group in the local that could be organized for that purpose? There is! In fact, a so-called progressive group under the name of "Cutters Friendship Club" has existed for some time, but the trouble with this club is that it is progressive in name only. It has no plan or program for work and consists of people that are looking for personal "political" advancement and that is the reason why they do not make any advancement within their club. For the same reason this group has broken apart and for quite some time there was no sign of life in that club. But of late before election in the local a few members began trying to revive activities again and began with participating in election. To have a club without a program for activities is bad enough but to have two candidates of the club running for the executive board and with them endorsing the entire administration slate under the name of "progressive unionism" is more than could be expected from people with minimum political wisdom.

But there are a greater number of people that are looking forward to organization for progressive action. Let us unite all these elements that sincerely believe in such a movement in Local No. 10. The time is ripe and the members demand it.

The Negro

IF WE MUST DIE . . .

by Claude McKay

*If we must die—let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die—oh, let us nobly die
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us tho' dead!
Oh, kinsmen! We must meet the common foe,
Tho' far outnumbered let us still be brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow.
What tho' before us is the open*