

# The Communist Party of America to the Communist International

By Louis Fraina



As the International Secretary, I make application for admission of the Communist Party of America to the Bureau of the Communist International as a major party.

The Communist Party, organized September 1, 1919, with approximately 55,000 members, issues directly out of a split in the old Socialist Party. The new party represents more than half the membership of the old party.

Socialist Party, Socialist Labor Party, I. W. W.

The Socialist Party was organized in 1901, of a merger of two elements: 1) seceders from the Socialist Labor Party, like Morris Hillquit, who split away in 1899 largely because of the S. L. P.'s uncompromising endeavors to revolutionize the trades unions; 2) the Social Democratic Party of Wisconsin, a purely middle-class liberal party tinged with Socialism, of which Victor L. Berger was representative.

The Socialist Labor Party, organized definitely in 1890, acted on the basis of the uncompromising proletarian class struggle. Appearing at a period when class relations were still in state of flux, when the ideology of independence, created by the free lands of the West, still persisted among the workers, the Socialist Labor Party emphasized the class struggle and the class character of the proletarian movement. Realizing the peculiar problems of the American movement, the Socialist Labor Party initiated a consistent campaign for revolutionary unionism and against the dominant craft unionism of the American Federation of Labor, which, representing the skilled workers- "aristocracy of labor"- sabotaged every radical impulse of the working class. The S. L. P. was a party of revolutionary Socialism, against which opportunist elements revolted.

The Spanish-American War was an immature expression of American Imperialism, initiated by the requirements of monopolistic Capitalism. A movement of protest developed in the middle class, which, uniting with the pre-

vious impulses of petty bourgeois and agrarian radicalism, expressed itself in a campaign of anti-Imperialism. There was a general revival of the ideology of liberal democracy. The Socialist Party expressed one phase of this liberal development; it adopted fundamentally a non-class policy, directing its appeal to the middle class, to the farmers, to every temporary sentiment of discontent, for a program of government ownership of the trusts. The Socialist Party, particularly, discouraged all action for revolutionary unionism, becoming the bulwark of the Comperized A. F. of L. and its reactionary officials, "the labor lieutenants of the capitalist class". This typical party of opportunist Socialism considered strikes and unions as of minor and transitory importance, instead of developing their revolutionary implications; parliamentarism was considered the important thing, legislative reforms and the use of the bourgeois state the means equally for waging the class struggle and for establishing the Socialist Republic. The Socialist Party was essentially a party of State Capitalism, an expression of the dominant moderate Socialism of the old International.

But industrial concentration proceeded feverishly, developing monopoly and the typical conditions of Imperialism. Congress- parliamentarism- assumed an aspect of futility as Imperialism developed and the Federal government became a centralized autocracy. The industrial proletariat, expropriated of skill by the machine process and concentrated in the basic industry, initiated new means of struggle. The general conditions of imperialistic Capitalism developed new tactical concepts- mass action in Europe and industrial unionism in the United States, the necessity for extra-parliamentary means to conquer the power of the state.

The old craft unionism was more and more incapable of struggling successfully against concentrated Capitalism. Out of this general situation arose the Industrial Workers of the World, organized in 1905- an event of the greatest revolutionary importance. The I. W. W. indicted craft unionism as reactionary and not in accord with the concentration of industry, which wipes out differences of skill and craft. The I. W. W. urged industrial unionism, that is to say, a unionism organized according to industrial division: all workers in one industry, regardless of particular crafts, to unite in one union; and all industrial unions to unite in the general organization, thereby paralleling the industrial structure of modern Capitalism. Industrial unionism was urged not simply for the immediate struggle of the workers, but as the revolutionary means for the workers to assume control of industry.

Previous movements of revolutionary unionism, such as the Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance and the American Labor Union, united in the I. W. W. The Socialist Labor Party was a vital factor in the organization of the I. W. W., Daniel De Leon formulating the theoretical concepts of industrial unionism. Industrial unionism and the conception of overthrowing the parliamentary state, substituting it with an industrial administration based upon the industrial unions, was related by De Leon to the general theory of Marxism.

The Socialist Party repeatedly rejected resolutions endorsing the

I. W. W. and industrial unionism, although supporting I. W. W. strikes by money and publicity. The Socialist Party supported the A. F. of L. and craft unionism, rejecting the revolutionary implications of industrial unionism- the necessity of extra-parliamentary action to conquer the power of the state.

After the panic of 1907, there was an awakening of the American proletariat. New and more proletarian elements joined the Socialist Party. Industrial unionism developed an enormous impetus, and violent tactical disputes arose in the party, particularly in the Northwest where the new unionism was a vital factor. These disputes came to a climax at the Socialist Party Convention of 1912. The tactical issue of industrial unionism was comprised in the problem of whether parliamentarism alone constituted political action, whether parliamentarism alone could accomplish the revolution or whether extra-parliamentary means were indispensable for the conquest of political power. The Socialist Party Convention, by a large majority, emasculated the Marxian conception of political action, limiting it to parliamentarism; an amendment to the party constitution defined political action as "participation in elections for public office and practical legislative and administrative work along the lines of the Socialist Party platform". That year the Socialist Party, by means of a petty bourgeois liberal campaign, polled more than 900,000 votes for its presidential candidate; but thousands of militant proletarians seceded from the party in disgust at the rejection of revolutionary industrial unionism, while William D. Haywood, representative of the industrialists in the party, was recalled on referendum vote as a member of the National Executive Committee.

The organization of the Progressive Party in 1912 made "progressivism" a political issue. The Socialist Party adapted itself to this "progressivism". But this progressivism was the last flickering expression of radical democracy; Theodore Roosevelt harnessed progressivism to Imperialism and State Capitalism. A new social alignment arose, requiring new Socialist tactics.

#### The War, the Socialist Party and the Bolshevik Revolution

After 1912, the party officially proceeded on its peaceful petty bourgeois way. Then- the war, and the collapse of the International. The official representatives of the Socialist Party either justified the betrayal of Socialism in Europe, or else were acquiesantly silent, while issuing liberal appeals to "humanity".

As the war continued and the betrayal of Socialism became more apparent, and particularly as the American comrades learned of the revolutionary minority elements in the European movement, there was a revolutionary awakening in the Socialist Party, strengthened by new accessions of proletarian elements to the party. The first organized expression of this awakening was the formation of the Socialist Propaganda League in Boston, in 1916, issuing a weekly organ which afterwards became "The New International", with Louis C. Fraina as Editor and S. J. Rutgers as Associate. The League emphasized the necessity of new proletarian tactics in the epoch of Imperialism.

In April, 1917, *The Class Struggle*, was started, a magazine devoted to International Socialism. In the State of Michigan, the anti-reformists captured the Socialist Party, and carried on a non-reformist agitation, particularly in *The Proletarian*.

The enormous exports of war munitions, the development of large reserves of surplus capital, and the assumption of a position of world power financially by American Capitalism forced the United States into the war. There was an immediate revolutionary upsurge in the Socialist Party. The St. Louis Convention of the Party, in April, 1917, adopted a militant declaration against the war, forced upon a reluctant bureaucracy by the revolutionary membership. But this bureaucracy sabotaged the declaration. It adopted a policy of petty bourgeois pacifism, uniting with the liberal People's Council, which subsequently accepted President Wilson's "14 points" as its own program. Moreover, there was a minority on the National Executive Committee in favor of the war; in August, 1918, the vote in the N. E. C. stood 4 to 4 on repudiation of the St. Louis Declaration. The Socialist Party's only representative in Congress, Meyer London, openly supported the war and flouted the party's declaration against the war; but he was neither disciplined nor expelled, in fact secured a renomination. Morris Hillquit accepted the declaration against the war, but converted it to bourgeois pacifism, being a prominent member of the People's Council. In reply to a question whether, if a member of Congress, he would have voted in favor of the war, Hillquit answered (*The New Republic*, December 1, 1917): "If I had believed that our participation would shorten the world war and force a better, more democratic and more durable peace, I should have favored the measure, regardless of the cost and sacrifices of America. My opposition to our entry into the war was based upon the conviction that it would prolong the disastrous conflict without compensating gains to humanity." This was a complete abandonment of the class struggle and the Socialist conception of war. The war was a test of the Socialist Party and proved it officially a party of vicious centrism.

The Russian Revolution was another test of the party. Officially, the Socialist Party was for the Menshevik policy and enthusiastic about Kerensky; while the New York *Call*, Socialist Party daily newspaper in New York City, editorially characterized Comrade Lenin and the Bolsheviks, in June, 1917, as "anarchists". The party officially was silent about the November Revolution; it was silent about the Soviet Government's proposal for an armistice on all fronts, although the National Executive Committee of the Party met in December and should have acted vigorously, mobilizing the party for the armistice. But the revolutionary membership responded, its enthusiasm for the Bolshevik Revolution being magnificent. This enthusiasm forced the party representatives to speak in favor of the Bolsheviks, but always in general terms capable of "interpretation". After the Brest-Litovsk peace, there was a sentiment among the party representatives for war against Germany "to save the Russian Revolution".

The Socialist Party carried on an active campaign against intervention in Russia. However, this campaign did not emphasize the revolutionary implications of the situation in Russia, as making mandatory the reconstruction



of the Socialist movement. A campaign against intervention must proceed as a phase of the general campaign to develop revolutionary proletarian action.

### The Left Wing Develops

During 1918 the Socialist Party was in ferment. The membership was more and more coming to think in revolutionary terms. Then came the armistice and the German Revolution. The response was immediate. On November 7, 1918, a Communist Propaganda League was organized in Chicago. On November 9 Local Boston, Socialist Party, started to issue an agitational paper, *The Revolutionary Age*. This paper immediately issued a call to the party for the adoption of revolutionary Communist tactics, emphasizing that the emergence of the proletariat into the epoch of the world revolution made absolutely imperative the reconstruction of Socialism. In New York City, in February 1919, there was organized the Left Wing Section of the Socialist Party. Its Left Wing Manifesto and Program was adopted by local after local of the Socialist Party, the Left Wing acquiring a definite expression. The Left Wing secured the immediate adherence of the Lettish, Russian, Lithuanian, Polish, Ukrainian, South Slavic, Hungarian and Esthonian Federations of the party, representing about 25,000 members. The official organs of the Federations did splendid work for the Left Wing.

In January, 1919, the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party decided to send delegates to the Berne Congress of the Great Betrayal. This action was characteristic of the social-patriot and centrist bent of the party administration. There was an immediate protest from the membership, the Left Wing using the Berne Congress as again emphasizing the necessity for the revolutionary reconstruction of Socialism. In March we received a copy of the call issued by the Communist Party of Russia for an international congress to organize a new International. "The Revolutionary Age" was the first to print the call, yielding it immediate adherence; while the Left Wing Section of New York City transmitted credentials to S. J. Rutgers to represent it at the congress. Local Boston initiated a motion for a referendum to affiliate the party with the Third International; this was thrown out by the national administration of the party on a technicality; but after much delay another local succeeded in securing a referendum. (The vote was overwhelmingly in favor of the Third International.)

The Left Wing was now, although still without a definite organization, a formidable power in the Socialist Party. Previously all revolts in the party were isolated or consisted purely of theoretical criticism; now there was this theoretical criticism united with a developing organization expression. There was not, as yet, any general conception of the organization of a new party; it was a struggle for power within the Socialist Party.

About this time the call for the new Socialist Party elections was issued. The Left Wing decided upon its own candidates. The elections constituted an overwhelming victory for the Left Wing. The national administration of the Socialist Party, realizing the impending disaster, decided upon desperate measures. Branch after branch and local after local of the

party, which had adopted the Left Wing Manifesto and Program, was expelled. Morris Hillquit issued a declaration that the breach in the party had become irreconcilable, and that the only solution was to split, each faction organizing its own party. At first the expulsions were on a small scale; then, the danger becoming more acute, the national administration of the party acted. The National Executive Committee met in May determined to "purge" the party of the Left Wing. The N. E. C. was brutal and direct in its means: *it refused to recognize the results of the elections*, declaring them illegal because of "frauds". It issued a call for an emergency national convention on August 30, which was to decide the validity of the elections, meanwhile appointing an "investigating committee". But in order to insure that the convention would "act right", the N. E. C. suspended from the Party the Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, Hungarian, South Slavic, Lettish and Lithuanian Federations, and the Socialist Party of Michigan State. In all, the N. E. C. suspended 40,000 members from the party- a deliberate, brazen move to control the election of delegates to the convention.

The charge of "fraud" was an easily detected camouflage. The elections were so overwhelmingly in favor of the Left Wing candidates as to prove the charge of fraud itself a fraud. For international delegates the vote was (excluding three states, where the returns were suppressed, but which would not alter the results), Left Wing candidates: John Reed 17,235; Louis C. Fraina, 14,124; C. E. Ruthenberg, 10,773; A. Wagenknecht, 10,650; I. E. Ferguson, 6,490- Right Wing candidates: Victor L. Berger 4,871; Seymour Stedman, 4,729; Adolph Germer, 4,622; Oscar Ameringer, 3,184; J. L. Engdahl, 3,510; John M. Work, 2,664; A. I. Shiplacoff, 2,346; James Oneal, 1,895; Algernon Lee, 1,858. Louis Boudin, who was prowar and against the Bolshevik Revolution secured 1,537 votes. The Left Wing elected 12 out of 15 members of the National Executive Committee. The moderates who had been dominant in the Socialist Party were overwhelmingly repudiated. Kate Richards O'Hare (supported by the Left Wing, although not its candidate) defeated Hillquit for International Secretary, 13,262 to 4,775.

The N. E. C., after these desperate acts and after refusing to make public the vote on the referendum to affiliate with the Communist International, decided to retain office until the convention of August 30, although constitutionally it should have retired on June 30.

The issue was now definite. No compromise was conceivable. Events were directly making for a split and the organization of a new party. The Old Guard was concerned with retaining control of the Socialist Party organization, even if minus the bulk of the membership; the Left Wing was concerned with the principles and tactics.

### The National Left Wing Conference and After

Just prior to the session of the National Executive Committee, Local Boston, Local Cleveland and the Left Wing Section of the Socialist Party of New York City, issued a call for a National Left Wing Conference, which met in New York City on June 21. The Conference was composed of 94 delegates representing 20 states, and coming overwhelmingly from the large in-

dustrial centers, the heart of the militant proletarian movement.

There was a difference of opinion in the Conference as to whether a Communist Party should be organized immediately, or whether the struggle should be carried on within the Socialist Party until the emergency convention August 30. The proposal to organize a new party immediately was defeated, 55 to 38. Thereupon 31 delegates, consisting mostly of the Federation comrades and the delegates of the Socialist Party of Michigan, determined to withdraw from the Conference. The majority in the Conference decided to participate in the Socialist Party emergency convention, all expelled and suspended locals to send contesting delegates; but issued a call for a convention September 1 "of all revolutionary elements" to organize a Communist Party together with delegates seceding from the Socialist Party convention.

One important thing was accomplished by the Left Wing Conference- it made definite the issue of a new party, which until that moment was very indefinite. The minority in the Conference emphasized the inexorable necessity for the organization of a new party. This was in the minds of practically all, but it now became a definite conviction. There were centrists in the Conference who still felt that the old party could be captured, who recoiled from a split; and these voted with the majority to go to the Socialist Party convention; but the majority in the majority was convinced of the necessity for a new party, differing with the minority of 31 simply on the right procedure to pursue.

After the Conference, the minority of 31 issued a call for a convention on September 1 to organize a Communist Party, repudiating all participation in the Socialist Party convention.

In the course of its development the Left Wing, while Communist in its impulse, had attracted elements not all Communist. There were conscious centrists; comrades who had for years been waging a struggle for administrative control of the party; and comrades who were disgusted with the gangster tactics pursued by the Old Guard in control of the party administration. The situation now began to clarify itself- Right Wing, Centre, Left Wing.

The important factor in this situation was the division in the organized Left Wing- the National Council, elected by the Left Wing Conference, and the minority which had organized a National Organization Committee and issued its own call for a Communist Party convention. This constituted more than a split in the Left Wing: *it was a split of the conscious Communist elements in the Left Wing.* This division, if persisted in, meant disaster. Unity was necessary- not simply organization unity, which at particular moments must be dispensed with, but *revolutionary* unity. This unity was accomplished by agreement for the merger of the two factions on the basis of a Joint Call for a Communist Party convention on September 1.

The overwhelming majority of the organizations and delegates represented at the Left Wing Conference accepted the Joint Call.

The Left Wing had found itself, unified itself, determined upon the organization of a real Communist Party.

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