
On the Party Horizon.

by Alexander Stoklitsky

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Comrade Lenin, in his pamphlet *Lessons of the Revolution*, lays great stress upon the educational role played by crises and revolutions upon the masses.†

He says:

A revolution marks a critical transition in the life of the great popular masses. Of course, only a fully matured crisis renders a real revolution possible and necessary. Moreover, even as a transition period in the life of a single individual teaches him much, leads him through an emotional stage suffused with new rich content, so also does a revolution teach a whole nation in a relatively short time highly instructive and valuable lessons.

An historical crisis is taking place in the American socialist movement. The Socialist Party of the United States is being rent by its own internal contradictions. The time for its inevitable breakdown has arrived. In this historical process the differentiation between the disciples of revolutionary Marxian socialism and the socialism of the social traitors, the American Scheidemanns, and the socialism of the hesitating and wavering Center becomes clearer and clearer.

There can be no return to the lethargic past. The suspension by the reactionary NEC of half the party membership is in itself of great significance. It points to the fact that counterrevolution in the party is rampant. One has not far to go in order to realize that the drastic measures resorted to by the NEC in the last few months are the direct result of the panic produced in their midst by the approaching inevitable split; and

their fear of losing control of the warm nest of opportunism they have so carefully nurtured since the organization of the party in 1891.‡

While the extreme Right has learned to sharply separate their opportunistic socialism from the principles of revolutionary socialism, our American Center has learned nothing. While the reactionary, counterrevolutionary social traitors have learned from the Bolsheviki to be resolute, the Center, here as everywhere in Europe, has learned nothing. Like their counterpart, the Center in Europe, they too are irresolute, they too vacillate, temporize, and remain stupid. We can only wish them “God speed.” **Because to us the split now going on in the ranks of the old Socialist Party is nothing less than the echo of the death battle of the Second International; it is the direct result of a growing revolutionary ferment in the great masses of the American people, which only the panic-stricken NEC and the irresolute Center with all their followers cannot or do not want to see.**

In such critical times every day is to be considered a month. What can be done in one day cannot be done in months in normal times. Only the blind and shortsighted Centrists can entertain the hope of uniting, conciliating, reorganizing the two antagonistic and irreconcilable camps — the opportunists and the revolutionary socialists.

As in revolutionary crises in any country, so the

†- *Uroki revoliutsii* (Lessons of the Revolution) was written at the end of July 1917 and first published in two parts in the Bolshevik official organ *Rachochy* on Sept. 12 and 13, 1917 (Aug. 30 and 31 o.s.). It was reissued with a short afterword as a pamphlet in September 1917 by Priboi Publishers. The material first appeared in English as Chapter X of Part 3 of *The Proletarian Revolution in Russia*, edited by Louis C. Fraina and published in 1919 (although listing a 1918 copyright date) by The Communist Press of New York. The material may be found in Lenin *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*, v. 34, pp. 53-69; in V.I. Lenin *Collected Works*, v. 25, pp. 227-243.

‡- The Socialist Party of America was actually established at a Unity Convention held July 29-Aug. 1, 1901 in Indianapolis, IN.

revolution in the Socialist Party, the split, teaches our members in a short time the most instructive, the most valuable lessons. They learn much, and benefit by the experiences of the hour; they learn to perceive and recognize their real needs.

Shall we ignore and keep in the background this great crisis in the party? Shall we reduce the struggle for revolutionary principles to a mere contest for the technical capture of a worthless party machine? Certainly not. Our task, the task of the supporters of the Third Communist International in America, is to widen the breach, to rigidly differentiate ourselves not only from the social patriots, but also from the unprincipled, conciliatory Centrists of all colors, shades, and tendencies.

More than that. Not only must we widen the breach between the old, and, in the eyes of the American and international proletariat, discredited party; we must at the same time launch a new revolutionary communist movement. Striking the opponents of revolutionary socialism one death blow after another from without, we must not for one moment forget the direct and ultimate aim of our struggle against the capitalistic structure.

To carry on our fight successfully on all fronts it is important that we at once lay the foundations of our fortress: The Communist Party of America. All hesitation in this work of constructing the new party will beget pernicious and destructive effects upon the normal development of our movement. To retreat from this straight and clearly indicated path to the goal of revolutionary socialism, to return to the tactics of the old, disgrace-covered party, will react as harmfully on bolshevism in America as it reacted upon the Spartans of Germany.

Every bridge leading to the old, rotten structure of opportunism must be destroyed. The proletarian masses must not hearken to the slogans of the Centrists, calling upon them to "capture" the opportunistic Socialist Party. The capture of the old party for "revolutionary socialism" is but a declaration of war upon windmills by the Don Quixotes of the Center.

Why capture the old party? Is the name of the Socialist Party so dear to the working class? No. The name of the Socialist Party is no longer dear to the proletariat. Years of reformatory and treacherous activity have covered it with mud and slime. Shall we

capture the old party for the sake of its party machine and form of organization? Its party machinery and form of organization is not fit for the cause of the revolutionary proletariat. Shall we capture it for its great mass of opportunistic literature? But that literature is only fit to be destroyed. For what then shall we capture the old party? For "revolutionary socialism?" But this slogan was good only until the rupture of the party, and for the purpose of rupturing the party.

Because the split in the party is an actual fact it becomes our sacred duty to construct a Communist Party.

Have the members and supporter of the Third Communist International endeavored to capture the Berne conference of the social traitors? Have they adopted the slogan "We must capture the Second International for revolutionary socialism?" No, they have not. It was the Centrists who ached for the capture of the Berne Conference, just as their counterpart the American Centrists strive to capture the American Socialist Party. Not the bolshevik, not the communist. Yes; even though we were sure to capture the party, we would refuse to do so; **we would but capture an empty shell** which would prove for us a false and disastrous step.

There is yet another argument used by our Centrists to cover the nudity of their unprincipled position. The wavering "majority" of the Left Wing Conference [New York: June 21-24, 1919] justifies its desire to capture the Socialist Party convention by their very modest claim that it is their intention to attract the socialist masses away from the social traitors.

"If admission to and representation at the convention is granted to us," they say, "we have the best opportunity to expose the injustice and the bureaucracy of the NEC. The delegates must understand us. And once they understand us they will assist us in capturing the party. Should we, however, not be admitted, should the reactionaries refuse to seat us, we then will be justified in leaving the Convention in a body and the masses will go with us." What a pitiful argument of wishy-washy Centrists!

Now, we ask, is there no other way of getting the support of the masses? Must we stoop so low as to beg admission in order that we may capture the masses? Bolshevik never run after the masses; communists are not satisfied to be the tail. They are ever in the lead. To

be the tail is the characteristic peculiarity of the Centrists. This is why we consider the majority of the Conference Centrists. We can consider them in no other light.

The builders of the Communist Party dare not run after masses whose hearts must be softened by the injustice of the NEC. We do not care for a Communist Party minus communist principles. Only consistent and principled supporters of the Third International can build a new and militant party. It is for this reason that the Minority Delegates at the Left Wing Conference decided to at once organize the Communist Party, even though there be only 20 or 30,000 who will stand with us.

The greater portion of the delegates to the New York Conference were anything but consistent adherents of the Left Wing. Rather was it an aggregation of individuals of various colors and shades, who, for one reason or another (but not because of their adherence to revolutionary principles) were disgruntled with conditions in the Socialist Party and objected to the “undemocratic” action of the NEC. There were Irish nationalists, ardent AF of L supporters; there were mere reformers and advocates of a new brand of pure American communism. And strange as it may seem, Comrade Louis Fraina made up the tail of this majority! Yes, Comrade Fraina turned his back upon revolutionary socialism to join hands with the lukewarm, watery, swampy majority. A warm crowd, indeed! But, Comrade Fraina, do you feel entirely comfortable in this fetid swamp?

To more emphatically characterize the uncertain position of this accidental majority of the Left Wing Conference it is sufficient to point out the clear and definite negative relation, so emphatically expressed

in one of the clauses in the Manifesto of the Third Communist International:

As regards the social patriots, who everywhere in the critical moment oppose the proletarian revolution with the force of arms, a merciless fight is absolutely necessary. As regards the Center, our tactics must be to separate the revolutionary elements by pitilessly criticizing the leaders. Absolute separation from the organization of the Center is necessary at a certain phase of development.

This proved to be too sharp for the majority of the “me too” communists. To attract the Centrists, the “me too” communists dulled the edge of that clause.

There is nothing accidental in the American Socialist Party, nor is there anything accidental in what took place at the Left Wing Conference. As everywhere in Europe, the American Socialist Party is divided into 3 distinct groups: the Right, the social traitors, headed by Berger and Hillquit, and permeated with the rottenness of the Second International; the Center, with whom Fraina cast his lot, who because of misunderstanding still continue to call themselves the “Left Wing,” and demand the capture of the party of the Right for “revolutionary socialism;” and the extreme Left, the Communists, who headed by the Russian Communist Federations and the Socialist Party of Michigan, readily answered the call of the Third Communist International.

“Down with the Socialist Party! Down with the wavering Center! Long live the militant Communist Party of America!”

This call of the Third Communist International will be answered only by those who consciously recognize the tactics and principles of revolutionary socialism. For others there is no room in the Communist Party.

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