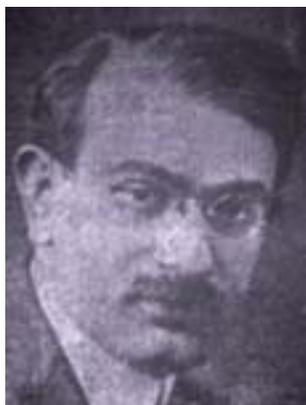

Can We Work for Socialism Outside the Socialist Party?

by William M. Feigenbaum

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In an article printed September 7, it was pointed out that the principle objective of the leaders of the Jewish Federation was not to withdraw



from the party, but to do as much damage to the Socialist Party as they could in their withdrawal.

If they had intended merely to withdraw from the party, it would have been easy enough to resign a year ago. If they had been interested only in getting members out, they might have waived another year instead of manipulating a packed convention, and getting a majority vote representing a mere minority of the members.

Their job was to do damage to the party, and they felt that more damage could be done by passing a motion of withdrawal — no matter how fraudulently obtained — than in any other way. In that way there would be the greatest discredit to the party, they felt.

Speakers at the convention vehemently asserted that the party wasn't worth saving; that it had outlived its usefulness; that it had betrayed the workers; that it wouldn't do. Very few facts were advanced to prove the statements, most of the arguments being mere recitals of individual shortcomings by party members. But, then, every error or "betrayal" by a leading members of the

party could be matched — and was — by Federation officials.

Of course, to say that the party had been weakened, that it had lost members, that its headquarters staff had been reduced, that its finances were in a bad way — as was gleefully said again and again — proves nothing, except that the campaign of the wreckers and disrupters, together with the work of the Ku Klux and the American Legion, had borne fruit.

If the party is not worth saving, there would be some justification for the methods of the Federation pilots in their roughhouse convention. And there the whole matter rests.

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The secession leaders believed, and said, that before anything constructive could be done it would be necessary to "clear the ground." That is, before building anything new, it was necessary to destroy the Socialist Party and to nullify its influence.

That explains the gamble of the leaders in being willing to lose 1,000 members, to drive them out by their ceaseless chatter over nonessentials, in order that they might carry their resolution of withdrawal.

Their game was, and is, to clean up, to mop up, the Socialist Party; to annihilate it, to destroy its influence. And here the matter ceases to be a matter of the Jewish Federation, or the camou-

flage “legal” party of Communists, or of the attitude of the Socialist Party. It is a matter of whether or not anything can be done for the cause of Socialism and working class emancipation by cleaning up the Socialist Party first.

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Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that the Socialist Party is guilty of every offense charged against it; that Morris Hillquit was willing to shoulder arms against the Soviets; that the party betrayed the St. Louis Manifesto; that the defense of the Socialist Assemblymen at Albany was a crime against Socialism; that the party leaders had been misleading the members for years. Assuming all that, is there any justification for the position that the party had to be swept away before any new work can be taken up?

Fortunately, there is history to go by.

In 1919 an element in the Socialist Party felt that the party had “betrayed” Socialism. They organized within the party, and endeavored to take out with them the major portion of the membership.

They withdrew some 40,000 members, and with them as a nucleus they were going to organize the entire working class and do something big.

If they were able to make good there would be something to show for it after 2 years; certainly there would be results in a country that has been through an unprecedented period of “outlaw” strikes, general unrest, discontent, and unemployment.

As a matter of fact, instead of making good, the membership of those organizations has dwindled. Not a single new member was gained, but more than nine-tenths of the old went out. Not a stroke of organization work has been done, except to throw a few manifestos from elevated trains and roofs. Instead of sections of a united party, the few hundred remaining men are two

angrily quarreling “parties,” periodically “uniting,” and then splitting again. All within 2 years.

That result has been achieved for one reason alone — because the Communist movement was born as a negative drive against the Socialist Party, rather than as a positive movement for some ideal or some method of organization.

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Of course, much has been accomplished in disorganization of the Socialist movement, chiefly by the discouragement that comes from fruitless factional discussion and denunciation. Where 10 members withdraw, 100 will be discouraged and drop out.

But that isn’t all. In addition to the fact that a movement based upon opposition to an existing organization cannot possibly grow there is the positive side.

Through the terrible years of disorganization, of reaction, of terrorism, the Socialist Party has become identified in the public mind with opposition to things as they are.

The Socialist Party has become identified with the great sacrifice being made by Eugene V. Debs. The Socialist Party is identified with the fight for free government that was made at Albany. The Socialist Party has become identified with the fight for Soviet Russia. The Socialist Party today, whether we like it or not, is the one organization today in the United States that is working toward a workers’ world, a free world, a Socialist world.

And no matter how grievously party members may have sinned — assuming every charge made against the party to be true — there is no way today of fighting for Socialism except through the Socialist Party.

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The enemy knows that. The Communists are realizing that. The workers, when they flock

to vote for the Socialist Party, know that.

In those states where the Socialist Party has been destroyed (sometimes by terrorism; sometimes by Communist factionalism), there is absolutely nothing to take its place. This is literally true. Where the Socialist Party has carried on its agitation and organization work; where it has created Socialist sentiment, there has been something worthwhile. The moment the organization has disappeared, all organization and agitation and education also disappeared.

This is as true in certain districts of New York and Detroit as it is in those sections of the West where not a vestige of a radical movement remains.

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Is the Socialist Party worth saving?

If there were any merit in the method of negation, that merit would have appeared within the past 2 years.

As a matter of fact, with all its faults and shortcomings, the only work for Socialism of any consequence that has been done within the past 2 years since the “new” methods were evolved, is the direct result of the Socialist Party’s work.

The Socialist Party has carried on. It has faced persecution, and it has continued its work for Socialism. It has been all but outlawed, and it has continued its work. It has sent its men and women into the country and on the street corners to bear the message of Socialism.

Possibly it has made mistakes. No one has failed to make mistakes except those who do nothing at all. To live is to err and to learn by the mistakes one makes.

If those who are now attempting to mop up the Socialist Party, and to eliminate it from the

field, had anything to offer that is new, if they had a new plan, or a new organization, then it might be different.

But they have nothing but negation, and the old, old yarns about the “betrayal” of the party.

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Are we interested in Socialism? Then there is no way but the Socialist Party!

And if the party makes mistakes, if its members err and blunder and are untrue, there is the way out that is perfectly plain.

[George] Lunn was a betrayer. He was ousted. So were [Algie] Simons and [Winfield] Gaylord; so were the string of mayors who did not do as their party bade them. The party membership rules, and it will always rule.

Today there is no way of effectively working for Socialism except through the Socialist Party. There is no better way of making Socialist work difficult, if not impossible, than by working against the Socialist Party and attempting to destroy it.

There is a job to be done.

It cannot be done by retailing the old, old stories of “betrayal.” It cannot be done by packing conventions. It cannot be done by stamped-ing federations.

It can be done only by *doing* it.

Those who want to see Socialism grow can work for Socialism. Let all others get out of the way.

The next item on the agenda now is to work for amnesty; and then to build up the Socialist sentiment, and the Socialist movement, and the Socialist Party.

The campaign is on.

Who is going to hold back?

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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