

CHAPTER VIII

THE SPLIT IN THE
SOCIALIST MOVEMENT

THE rising tide of political reaction in the United States finds the working class still largely unorganized. The majority of the organized workers in the American Federation of Labor are still attached through their leaders to the two capitalist parties. Even the two anti-capitalist parties, Socialist and Communist, are not yet united in a common front against the forces of reaction. The question arises as to how a broad united front against reaction can be formed when not even Communists and Socialists, who are most conscious of the danger, have been able to get together. This was expressed to me by a puzzled anti-fascist who wrote:

"I used to think there was a Socialist Party that stood for socialism, and a Communist Party that stood for communism. But I have learned that the Communist Party stands for socialism, apparently the same thing that the Socialist Party stands for, but for a different method of getting it, and that there is a life-and-death struggle going on between these two parties that stand for the same thing. What is the sense of all this?"

To untangle this apparent puzzle, it is necessary, first of all, to give an historical review of the split in the world Socialist movement since the World War. With this as a background we can later take up the question of how unity can be achieved on the immediate issues of the day, and discuss practical methods of healing the split.

To begin with let us briefly sketch the history of modern Socialism, that is, Scientific Socialism as distinguished from the Utopian types. Its origin dates from 1847 when Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the founders of Scientific Socialism, wrote the famous document, *The Communist Manifesto*. This laid down the basic principles of the Socialist movement in such clear and developed form that in all fundamental respects it reads like a contemporary document and holds good for the most important problems of today. The *Manifesto*, together with the subsequent writings of Marx and Engels, soon dominated the thought and action of the rising working class movements in Europe, and, to a lesser degree, in America. Its principles became the basis of the First International and still later, for a period, of the Second International, both of which were international associations of working class parties, and to some extent of the trade union movement.

From 1847 onward the terms Communist and Socialist were used more or less interchangeably as the name for the dominant trend in the organized movement of the workers, a trend which was given its best expression in the writings and works of Marx and Engels. Originally they and their associates definitely used the name Communist, in order to sharply distinguish themselves from the various schools of Utopian or petty-bourgeois Socialism. Later on, under the influence of the growth of the mass Social-Democratic Party in Germany, the term Socialist or Social-Democratic was most frequently used, and the label of Communism was in general relegated to theoretical works and text-books.

The outbreak of the World War in 1914 disclosed to the working classes of the world that the leadership of the Socialist Parties in most countries had become bankrupt. Their leadership and program had been corrupted. This culminated in the abandonment of the fundamental aims of the modern So-

cialist movement. The leaders had adjusted themselves to capitalism and to the desires of the capitalist class. Many of them had been absorbed into the capitalist ruling machine. When the World War came this fact which had previously been concealed was dramatically exposed to the workers. These Socialist leaders repudiated all their pledges for an uncompromising struggle against capitalist war by voting war credits to their respective governments. They declared a moratorium on the class struggle within each country. This meant the cessation of struggles for the interest of the workers. The final step in this betrayal came when they accepted government posts in the war administrations and became the most active recruiting officers for the imperialist armies, each in support of his own national ruling class.

The collapse of the Second International at the outbreak of the World War came as a surprise, as a revelation, to the masses of workers in most countries. It had, however, been foreseen and predicted, long before the betrayal occurred, by those Socialists who had remained true to the teachings of Marx and Engels. These revolutionary Socialists had for years been combating the growing opportunistic practices of the leadership of the various Socialist Parties. In only one party had Marxism defeated and driven out opportunism. That party was the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party (Bolsheviks) under the leadership of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. Since 1903 that party had politically and organizationally separated itself from the opportunism and revisionism of Marxism of the dominant leadership of the Second International.

After the outbreak of the World War the party of Lenin was the only party which not only placed itself in uncompromising opposition to the imperialist war, but also broadcast a clear program of struggle to transform the imperialist war into a civil war against the exploiting classes, for peace

and for the establishment of a new socialist society. It was the existence of such a revolutionary, Marxian, Socialist Party which made it possible for the first break in the capitalist system to take place in Russia. It was this party which led the masses to the establishment of the first working class government, the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic, which was later incorporated into the broader Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

One year after the establishment of Soviet power in Russia, the collapse of German and Austrian imperialism placed power in the hands of the opportunist leaders of Social-Democracy in those countries. In contrast to what the Russian Bolsheviks had done, the leaders of the German and Austrian Social-Democratic Parties used their powers, not to establish a workers' government, but, on the contrary, with the help of counter-revolutionary officers they crushed the revolt of the revolutionary working class, and restored the state power back to the hands of the capitalists.

The rupture between the two tendencies in the Socialist movement had thus been completed. In every country this movement was divided into those who supported and wished to follow the example of the Bolsheviks, and those who supported and followed the leaders of German Social-Democracy.

In 1919 this split was given organizational form on a world scale. On one side was founded the Communist International, as the World Party of revolutionary Socialism under the leadership of the Bolsheviks was called. On the other side was the re-establishment of the old Second International as a world coalition of opportunism, collaborating with the capitalists to stabilize their disintegrating system, under the guidance of the German Social-Democrats.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks proposed to distinguish revolutionary Socialism from the opportunist practices of the Second

International by restoring the historic and honorable name, Communist, the original banner raised by Marx and Engels in 1847. Immediately after his return to Russia, Lenin posed the question in his world-famous pamphlet, *The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution*, published April 10, 1917.

"I am coming to the last point, the name of our Party. We must call ourselves the Communist Party—just as Marx and Engels called themselves Communists.

"We must insist that we are Marxists and that we have as a basis the *Communist Manifesto*, which has been perverted and betrayed by the Social-Democracy on two important points: (1) The workers have no country; 'national defense' in an imperialist war is a betrayal of Socialism; (2) Marx's teaching about the state has been perverted by the Second International.

"The term 'Social-Democracy' is unscientific, as Marx showed repeatedly, particularly in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in 1875, and as Engels restated in a more popular form, in 1894. Mankind can pass directly from capitalism only into socialism, *i.e.*, into social ownership of the means of production and the distribution of products according to the work of the individual. Our Party looks further ahead than that: socialism is bound sooner or later to ripen into communism, whose banner bears the motto: 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.'"

Thus the two names which in the past had served interchangeably to identify one united modern scientific Socialist movement became the distinguishing labels of two divergent tendencies, which finally became two definitely organized political movements within the working class. The Communist movement continued and developed the original teachings of Marx and Engels: the conquest of power by the workers as the basis for the transformation of society to socialism. The Socialist movement took the road of struggle against the socialist revolution, of coalition with the bour-

geoisie for the restoration of the broken-down system of capitalism, from which it promised that socialism would "peacefully evolve" step by step.

The logical fruits of these two policies, these two divergent paths, are before us today, 16 years after this split took organizational form. Let us examine the results of these two policies in the countries where they came to power. In Germany the fruit of opportunism is seen in Hitler and the fascist barbarism which is plunging that country deeper into chaos. In Austria the same results came from opportunist practices, ending in the fascism of Dollfuss, succeeded by Schuschnig-Starhemberg. In Russia, in sharp contrast, the fruit of revolutionary Marxism—that is, Communism—is seen in the triumphant victory of the construction of socialism for the first time in history. There socialism has won its final and irrevocable victory, and is leading the people of the Soviet Union to ever-growing prosperity and is expanding their power and influence in the whole world.

These facts explain why the American Socialist Party under its Old Guard leadership, in spite of its name, did not stand for socialism. Hundreds of thousands of its worker followers sincerely want and strive for socialism. New groups and leaders are now rising who desire to turn away from its old bankrupt policies. But the reactionary wing of Old Guard leaders take them in the opposite direction by the use of fraud and force. The lessons of the German experience are the best explanation of where Old Guard policies always lead. In every country where the Socialist Party became a political power it entered the service of capitalism. The policies of the German Social-Democratic Party typify the course pursued by all Socialist parties until recently. The differences in the various countries were only in detail and not of basic principle.

The Communist Parties in the various countries represent

the chief organized forces consciously and earnestly fighting for socialism. The only socialist society that has ever been established is under the direct leadership of the Communist Party. The Communist International unites the Communist Parties of the entire world into a single World Party which hammers out a uniform world policy, adjusted in each country to the peculiarities of the national situation, and to the special problems of the oppressed masses.

The World War and the October Revolution, which brought to a split the divergent tendencies in the international Socialist movement, interrupted the process of the emergence in the United States of the Socialist Party as the mass party of the working class. The ruthless expulsion just after the war of the large majority of the Socialists by their Right-wing leaders, because they were taking the path to the Communist International, shattered the Socialist Party. And at the same time this brought into existence the Communist Party in an immature state, split at birth into two parties, without trained organizational cadres, and afflicted by all the infantile "Left" sicknesses. This weak condition was accentuated by governmental repression and illegalization of the Communists.

The connection with the mass of the American workers was thus broken for both the Socialist and Communist Parties. The latter is only now beginning to re-conquer, on a higher plane, some of the mass positions which were in the process of being won when the war and the split in the Socialist movement abruptly broke them up. The leaders of the Socialist Party, until recently dominated by the Old Guard which is undeviatingly Right-wing in policy, maintained a precarious position only by sacrificing even their reformist program for an alliance with the openly pro-capitalist sections of the A. F. of L. bureaucracy. This accounts for the unusual weakness of

the Socialist Party as a political factor and force in the United States.

There can be no question that the split caused by reformism in the Socialist movement, and the bitter struggle between the Socialist and Communist Parties, served to drive away large masses of workers. Because they did not understand the issues involved in the struggle, they turned their backs on both parties and upon socialism in general. In turn, this weakened the power of socialism to attract the non-proletarian sections of the population as allies of the revolution. The Old Guard leaders have utilized this fact to instil among the Socialist workers a prejudice against Communists as disrupters who ruined the American Socialist movement. They of course quietly ignore their own role as violators of party democracy who expelled the majority of the membership of the Socialist Party when the latter decided to go to the Third International.

This splitting action was carried out by the same Old Guard—the Cahans, Lees, and Oneals—who today again threaten to expel the majority of the Socialist Party. This new split in the Socialist Party began when, by a majority, it adopted the Detroit Declaration of Principles in 1934, thus taking an important though hesitating step toward the Left. We Communists have never sufficiently made known to the majority of the workers who remained with the Socialist Party the true history and character of the split that took place in 1919. The struggle for the united front with the Socialist Party and its followers must overcome the long-continued hostilities and their consequent inbred prejudices. This cannot be done merely by reciting facts and past history. It must be done politically, by giving an answer to that healthy desire of the Socialist rank and file for a united proletarian party of Socialism, a desire for unity growing out of the needs of

daily struggle which the Right-wing leaders distort into an obstacle to unity.

The question of the united front of Socialists and Communists on issues of the day, to build a Farmer-Labor Party, to fight against fascism and war, is of tremendous and immediate importance. Small as both parties still are, their united action would multiply their influence over the masses very many times. It would change the whole political complexion of the organized labor movement almost over night. It would put a check to the development of reactionary influences in thousands of places where they now run wild. It would speed up the whole political development of the American working class. In short, to win the decisive sections of the Socialist Party for the united front is an absolute necessity, a matter of life and death to the toiling masses.

To achieve this requires the isolation and defeat of that little group of reactionary Old Guard leaders who ride the Socialist movement like an old man of the sea, choking its development, keeping it in sectarian isolation. It is they who are consciously and stubbornly counter-revolutionary and anti-Socialist, even collaborating with open fascists like Hearst. To help all those individuals and groups within and around the Socialist Party who are breaking with the old reformist reactionary policies, and who are moving however confusedly towards a class struggle program and towards the united front, requires the closest, most friendly, and most patient collaboration on the part of the Communists.

To the degree that Socialists and Communists can unite for the building of the Farmer-Labor Party and to fight for immediate demands, to that degree is opened up perspectives for the organic unity of Socialists and Communists into *one revolutionary party of Socialism*. We are coming to the end of that period, which began with the betrayal by the leaders of

the Second International in the World War, and the rise of the Third International on the basis of the Russian Revolution, the period of the world-wide split in the Socialist movement. We are entering the period which will witness the healing of this split, a period which was begun by the final victory of socialism in the Soviet Union.

The problem of the organic unity of Socialist and Communist workers into one party is not being raised by us as a substitute for joint action on immediate problems. It is united action on the practical questions of the day which will build up mutual confidence and lay the foundation for future organic unity. We place this slogan of united action by all adherents of socialism, and their eventual unity into one revolutionary party, against the slogan of the Old Guard leaders who call for a united front with the open supporters of capitalism, even with fascists like Hearst, against the Communists.