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# The Socialist Task and Outlook.

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It is safe to assert that at no time since the formation of the First International has the socialist movement of the world been in a state of such physical disunion, moral ferment, and intellectual confusion as it is today. The world war, so sudden in its outbreak, so titanic in its dimensions, and so disastrous in its effects, had placed the socialist movement in Europe before a situation, which it had not foreseen as a concrete reality and, for which it was totally unprepared, and it reacted to it in a most unexpected and disheartening manner. Far from proving the formidable bulwark against war which their friends and enemies alike had believed them to be, the powerful cohorts of European socialism on the whole supported their capitalist governments in the capitalist war, almost as enthusiastically and unreservedly as the most loyal Junker classes, and when with the collapse of the war, the socialist revolutions broke out in several countries, their forms of struggle were equally startling. The bourgeoisie, against whom the revolutions were directed, made little or no effective resistance, and the fight, repressive and sanguinary at times, was principally among those who before the war called each other comrades in the Socialist movement.

There is something radically wrong in a movement that could mature such sad paradoxes and that wrong must be discovered and eliminated if the international socialist movement is to survive as an effective instrument of the working-class revolution. What was wrong with the Second International and how are its mistakes to be avoided in the future? This is the main question which agitates and divides the socialist

movement today, and upon the solution of which the future of our movement depends.

It may be somewhat premature to pass conclusive judgment upon the contending views and methods of contemporary socialism or to attempt to formulate a complete revision of the socialist program. Socialist history is still in the making and history has recently shown an almost provoking disregard for preconceived theories and rigid formulae. But enough has happened since August 1, 1914, to justify several definite conclusions, both as to the wrongs and remedies of the situation.

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Why did the Second International fail? Some of our neo-revolutionary ideologists conveniently account for it upon the theological theory of lapse from grace. The socialists of the pre-war period had become too materialistic and “constructive,” they paid too much attention to political office and reforms, they were corrupted by bourgeois parliamentarism — “they forgot the teachings of the founders of scientific socialism” (how reminiscent of the familiar ecclesiastic complaint — “they abandoned the faith of their fathers”!).

Marxian socialists, accustomed to look to material causes for the explanation of political events and manifestations, can hardly accept this explanation, which after all only reiterates and describes, but does not explain, and furnishes no guide for correction. It asks sternly: What were the economic causes which deflected the socialist movement of Europe from the

path of revolutionary, proletarian internationalism? And the answer is as startling and paradoxical as the entire recent course of the socialist movement. It was the economic organization of the European workers, and the pressure of their immediate economic interests (as understood by them) that broke the solidarity of the Socialist International.

It was not parliamentarism which was primarily responsible for the mischief. Excessive parliamentarism in the socialist movement of Europe had undoubtedly contributed substantially to the disaster, negatively as well as positively, but on the whole the socialists in Parliament expressed the sentiments of their constituents pretty faithfully.

The Social-Democratic deputies of Italy, Russia, Serbia, and Bulgaria knew how to use the parliaments of their countries as revolutionary tribunals, and so did Liebknecht, Rueble, and Ledebour in Germany.

The parliaments of Germany and France were the scenes of socialist betrayal. Its mainsprings lay much deeper.

The countries in which the socialist movement failed most lamentably are precisely those in which the movement was most closely linked to organized labor, while the principles of international solidarity were upheld most rigorously in countries in which the economic labor movement was either very weak or quite detached from the socialist movement. In the United States, where this detachment was more complete than in any other modern country, the American Federation of Labor, under the leadership of Samuel Gompers, outdid all jingoes in the orgy of profiteering, while the Socialist Party adopted the St. Louis platform. The bulk of the Social Democracy in Germany was made up of workers organized upon the same structure and looking to the same immediate ends as the American Federation of Labor. The German workers were more progressive than their American brethren. They acted politically within the Social Democratic Party. They had their own representatives in parliament, and their social-patriotic stand found parliamentary expression, just as the social-patriotic

spirit of the "non-political" American Federation of Labor vented itself in extra-parliamentary action. What is true of Germany applies also, though perhaps in varying degree, to Austria, Belgium, France, and Great Britain. Conversely, in Russia, Italy, and the Balkan countries, in all of which the element of organized labor was a negligible factor in the socialist movement, the socialists have on the whole successfully withstood the wave of nationalistic reaction, and when the first break came, it was Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, and Franz Mehring in Germany, Fritz Adler in Austria, Lenin and Trotsky in Russia, and Jean Longuet in France, all intellectuals, that led the socialist revolts in their countries.

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What then is the inference to be drawn from these facts? Shall revolutionary socialism hereafter dissociate itself from organized labor? By no means. A socialist movement without the support of the workers is a sort of disembodied spirit; in fact, a spook. Socialism must remain the political and spiritual guide of the working class, but it must reorganize and reeducate the working class.

The fundamental weakness of the organized labor movement has been that it was a movement of a class within a class, a movement for the benefit of the better-situated strata of labor — the skilled workers. As such a semi-privileged class, the economic organizations of labor had attained large power in the leading countries of Europe and in the United States before the war. They enjoyed a sort of governmental recognition, and had accumulated considerable material wealth. They had certain "vested interests" in the capitalist regimes of their respective countries. In addition to this basic shortcoming, and largely because of it, the workers were organized along the narrow lines of separate trades and crafts. This form of organization naturally limits the efforts and activities of the workers to the petty struggles and interests of their own special trades. It creates a psychology of craft solidar-

ity, rather than class solidarity, and deflects the workers' attention from the ultimate goal to immediate benefits.

In such conditions the parliamentary activities of labor's political representatives cannot but reflect the narrow economic policies of their constituents. The petty political reform measures of the pre-war socialists correspond to the craft organization in the economic field, and the striving of the organized workers to preserve their economic position within the industrial system of their country and to protect it against the menace of enemy capitalists is the basis of the war-patriotism of their parliamentary representatives.

The first task of the post-war Socialist International must, therefore, be to organize and reorganize all grades and strata of labor on broad class lines, not only nationally, but internationally. Not as trade unions, nor even as mere industrial unions, but as one working-class union.

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This first lesson to be drawn from the recent experiences and failures of the old International applies, of course, mainly, if not exclusively, to the countries still remaining under capitalist-class control. In the countries that have passed, or are passing, to a regime of Communist or Socialist government the problem presents itself in a different and more advance form. Shall the socialization of industries and national life be attempted by one master stroke, or shall it be carried out gradually and slowly? Shall the working class immediately assume the sole direction of the government as a working-class government, or shall it share governmental power and responsibilities with the capitalist class, at least, "during the period of transition"?

While the question involved is primarily one of power, to be determined in each country according to the conditions existing at the critical moment, there can be no doubt about the stand which the Socialist International must take on it. In all cases in which the proletariat of a country in revolution has assumed the

reins of government as a pure working-class government, determined upon the immediate socialization of the country, the true socialists of all countries will support it. Whether we approve or disapprove of all the methods by which such proletarian government has gained or is exercising its power is beside the question. Each revolution develops its own methods, fashioning them from the elements of the inexorable necessities of the case.

The socialists of the foreign countries are face by an accomplished fact and by the simple alternative of supporting the revolution or counterrevolution. It is quite evident that no socialist or socialist party that makes common cause with the ultra-reactionary elements of bourgeois and Tsarist Russia in supporting foreign military intervention against the Soviet government, or in any other way actively opposes that government in the face of its life-and-death struggle with international capitalism and imperialism, has a legitimate place in the international socialist movement. The same may, of course, be said of the socialist attitude toward Hungary.

In countries like Germany, in which the struggle for mastery lies between two divisions of the socialist movement, one class-conscious and the other opportunist, one radical and the other temporizing, the support of the Socialist International must, for the same reason, go to the former.

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Such, it seems to me, must be the main outline of the guiding policy of the new International. Upon such or similar general program must the Third International be built. For the Third International of socialism has not yet been created, nor have its foundations been laid, either at Berne or in Moscow.

The Berne conference proved hopelessly backward and totally sterile, although some elements in it showed a distinct understanding of the new order of things. The Communist Congress at Moscow made the mistake of attempting a sort of dictatorship of the

Russian proletariat in the Socialist International and was conspicuously inept and unhappy in the choice of certain allies and in the exclusion of others. It has not advance the process of reorganization of the socialist movement of the world.

The task of organizing the Third International is still before us. It must be accomplished on the basis of principles and conduct, not on that of personal likes or dislikes. It is the common task of all international socialists.

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The attitude of the Socialist Party of the United States toward international problems is thus clearly outlined. From the temper of its membership and from the official utterances of its administrative bodies, fragmentary as they necessarily had to be under extraordinary restrictions, there can be no doubt about the party's advanced and militant position. How is that position to be translated into a domestic program?

The platform and policies of the Socialist Party must be revised in keeping, not only with the development of socialism abroad, but also with regard to the changes wrought by the war in the United States.

The United States emerges from the war the strongest capitalist country in the world, not only because of the superiority of its material and military resources, but also because the power of capitalism has been less shaken in the United States than in any of the advanced countries of Europe. Our "liberal" administration has turned to the lowest depths of reaction and repression without effective resistance or opposition on the part of any considerable section of the population. The "progressive" elements in politics and social reform have collapsed like a house of cards, and organized labor has so far remained inert and passive. The only voice of protest and the only vision of progress have come from the Socialist Party and a negligible group of industrial workers and radical individuals. But the Socialist Party is as yet an insignificant factor in the political and social life of America. The impor-

tance of American socialism lies in the future, probably the immediate future. The futility of the war, the failure of "peace," the governmental persecution and repression, the stupid obscurantism of the press and the terrorism of countless private and public agencies are bound to cause a reaction of revolt, and a period of unemployment and intensified exploitation will arouse the American workers from the narcotics of their leaders' empty phrases. Then it will be that the workers of America will look for a new light and guidance, and the socialists of America will have their opportunity. To prepare for that period, and to hasten its coming, is the present task of American Socialism, and that means primarily two things — propaganda and organization. Propaganda in international socialism in the modern and advanced meaning of the term; propaganda of new class-line unionism, systematic propaganda through all methods available, including political campaigns and legislative forums, and organization of all effective organs of such propaganda. At no time was a comprehensive and harmonious plan of action along such lines so urgently imperative for the socialist movement in America as it is just now.

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All the more unfortunate is it that the energies of the Socialist Party should at this time be dissipated in acrimonious and fruitless controversies brought on by the self-styled "Left Wing" movement. I am one of the last men in the party to ignore or misunderstand the sound revolutionary impulse which animates the rank and file of this new movement, but the specific form and direction which it has assumed, its program and tactics, spell disaster to our movement. I am opposed to it, not because it is too radical, but because it is essentially reactionary and non-socialistic; not because it would lead us too far, but because it would lead us nowhere. To prate about the "dictatorship of the proletariat" and of "workers' soviets" in the United States at this time is to deflect the socialist propaganda from its realistic basis, and to advocate "the abolition

of *all* social reform planks” in the party platform means to abandon the concrete class struggle as it presents itself from day to day.

The “Left Wing” movement, as I see it, is a purely emotional reflex of the situation in Russia. The cardinal vice of the movement is that it started as a “wing,” i.e., as a schismatic and disintegrating movement. Proceeding on the arbitrary assumption that they were the “Left,” the ingenuous leaders of the movement had to discover a “Right,” and since the European classification would not be fully reproduced without a “Center,” they also were bound to locate a Center in the socialist movement of America. What matters it to our imaginative “Left Wing” leaders that the Socialist Party of America as a whole has stood in the forefront of socialist radicalism ever since the outbreak of the war, that many of its officers and “leaders” have exposed their lives and liberties to imminent peril in defense of the principles of international socialism? They are “Right Wingers” and “Centrists” because the exigencies of the “Left Wing” requires it. The “Left Wing” movement is a sort of burlesque on the Russian revolution. Its leaders do not want to convert their com-

rades in the party. They must “capture” and establish a sort of dictatorship of the proletariat (?) within the party. Hence the creation of their dual organization as a kind of “soviet,” and their refusal to cooperate with the aforesaid stage “Centrists” and “Right-Wingers.”

But the performance is too sad to be amusing. It seems perfectly clear that, so long as this movement persists in the party, the latter’s activity will be wholly taken up by mutual quarrels and recriminations. Neither “wing” will have any time for the propaganda of socialism. There is, as far as I can see, but one remedy. It would be futile to preach reconciliation and union where antagonism runs so high. Let the comrades on both sides do then next best thing. Let them separate — honestly, freely, and without rancor. Let each side organize and work in its own way, and make such contribution to the socialist movement in America as it can. Better a hundred times to have two numerically small socialist organizations, each homogeneous and harmonious within itself, than to have one big party torn by dissensions and squabbles, an impotent colossus on feet of clay. The time for action is near. Let us clear the decks.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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