

structions from home. Russians made up the largest group. The Union of Russian Workers, a quasi-syndicalist body, with branches in the Eastern and Midwestern industrial cities, numbering about 9,000, lost half of its membership in the trek. Bill Shatoff's Russian anarchist group, Bread and Freedom, in Chicago, went back to Russia almost in a body.

The movement back to Russia did not by-pass the Jewish radicals. Each grouping had its returnees. Prominent among them were Ber Borochoy, Alexander Khashin, Labor Zionists; Yasha Secoder, Moishe Katz, territorialist-Socialists; A. Litwak, Max Goldfarb and Shachno Epstein, Bundists. Had the Provisional government remained in office a little longer, the trickle back to Russia might have turned into a stream. As it was, a few hundred Jews, mostly intellectuals and semi-intellectuals, returned to Russia.

4 *The Left Wing*

The American Left Wing, similar to its counterparts elsewhere, rose out of disillusionment and impatience with the pace of social change. It derived its most compelling impulse from the Bolshevik Revolution. A rebellious mood, its origins rooted in the tradition of American radicalism, that in all probability would have settled into a vague oppositional left tendency within the existing movement, was turned under the dazzling example of a "dream come true" into the carrier of Communism in the United States.

The war in Europe uprooted in the minds of many Socialists the belief in the stability of the social-economic system. Shaken also was their deep-seated trust in the internationalism of the moderates. The longer the war lasted the deeper grew their angry impatience. Hopes pinned on the Russian Provisional government to take the initiative in ending the bloodshed were dashed by the ill-fated offensive begun by Alexander Kerensky in the summer of 1917 on the Austrian front.

At the lowest ebb of radical spirit, the proclamation of a Soviet Socialist Republic in Russia came as a renewal of faith. The explosive simplicity of this act was fascinating. Most of the syndicalists and anarchists, the latter avowed enemies of any state, were also captivated by the new Soviet Republic. Some of the anarchist groups even added the word *Soviet* to their name. Particularly attractive was the Bolshevik slogan, "All power to the Soviets;" the Soviets (councils), a body of workers, peasants and soldiers, appeared as a decentralized democratic regime, based on the popular will. And when the Soviets were threatened from within and from

without, anarchist groups here loudly called for its defense against White Guards and imperialists. They went even further. In a cable to Leon Trotsky, March 2, 1918, Leonard Abbott, in behalf of the Ferrer Association, Stelton, N. J., wrote:

ARE FORMING RED GUARDS TO HELP YOU
DEFEND THE REVOLUTION

The cable was intercepted by the authorities. In a similar message, wired on the same day to Bill Shatoff, Smolny Institute, Eleanor Fitzgerald, a well-known anarchist, stated:

. . . OUR LIVES AND OUR LAST CENT ARE WITH YOU
IN YOUR FIGHT *15 +3

The widely publicized Mollie Steimer case in 1918 grew out of a leaflet published by a group of young Jewish anarchists calling themselves the American Anarchist Federated Commune Soviets. The leaflet urged the transport and marine workers not to load or carry ammunition to the imperialist enemies of the Soviets. Jacob Abrams, Mollie Steimer and five others were sentenced to 15 years in prison, and were deported to Russia after serving three years. Steimer and Abrams left Russia in 1926, implacable enemies of Communism.*16

Even the first violent clash between the Bolsheviks and the anarchists in Moscow, April 1918, did not cure the local anarchists of their utopian hopes for Lenin's Russia. Only after the sailors' uprising in Kronstadt, March 1921, bloodily suppressed by the Communists, did American anarchists finally break with Bolshevism.

Anarchist myopia to Bolshevism can be explained in part by their indiscriminate opposition to all political activities. This, as Professor Lewis Lorwin has remarked, made them unable to tell democrats from authoritarians.+4 Another reason for the acceptance by the anarchists of the Bolshevik Revolution may have been the oppressive measures applied against them following America's entrance into the war. America appeared to them like a cruel step-mother, while Soviet Russia was beckoning to them with a tender promise.

RIGHT, LEFT—AND CENTER

The sober truth that Lenin and Trotsky had not overthrown the Czars but a democratic government seemed a trifle to the enthusiastic radicals. As one observer put it: thrilled by the flames, they

overlooked the devastation of the fire. One thing was uppermost in their minds: the Bolsheviks had succeeded where others had failed. The crusading spirit of early Socialism in America, noticeably flagging in the movement's prosperous years, came miraculously to life again.

By the same token, the Bolshevik Revolution spelled the end of gradualism for many Socialists and radicals. Moreover, it dispelled the traditional belief of Marxists and non-Marxists alike that victory would be reached only after a majority of the working population would be won over. Had not Lenin demonstrated that a small but resolute and disciplined minority could, by utilizing a favorable situation, boldly seize power? Disappointment with the German Socialists, who returned the government to a coalition after the first election following the political upheaval of 1918, only heightened the enormous prestige of the uncompromising Bolsheviks.

Instead of the old division of orthodox and revisionist, or moderate and extremist, a new one appeared, the Right and Left Wing—and Center added for good measure.

The brains of the Bolshevik Revolution, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (Ulianov) was previously unknown in the American movement. The intellectuals from Russia who knew of him were repelled by the rigidity of his thought, the abusiveness of his tone and the unscrupulousness of his tactics. And the swirling political current that led to Kerensky's overthrow was incomprehensible to most of them. Only the small group of pro-Bolsheviks in the Russian Socialist Federation that followed intensely the desperate struggle between the Bolsheviks and their Socialist and democratic opponents were aware of Lenin's audacious plans.

TROTSKY AND BUKHARIN IN AMERICA

This group was strengthened in 1915 by the arrival here from Copenhagen of Nicholas Bukharin, a young Marxist theoretician, a likable personality and an old disciple of Lenin, recently escaped from exile in Siberia. Leon Trotsky (Bronstein), who came here January 14, 1917, further added to their strength. Trotsky had been deported from Austria, France and Spain, successively. And in 1917 the theoretical division between Lenin and Trotsky had narrowed down considerably, Trotsky largely accepting Lenin's views.

Bukharin became editor of the *Novy Mir*, organ of the federation,

and was later joined by Trotsky. The writings and speeches of these two talented men molded opinion in the Russian group.⁺⁵ They cemented around the paper a pro-Bolshevik circle. (The important posts the majority of them later occupied in Russia moved Hillquit to remark sarcastically, "If one wishes to become a commissar in Russia he has at least to sweep the floors in the *Novy Mir*.")

The foreign-born Socialists listened to Bukharin and Trotsky with respect. Trotsky delivered several lectures in German and Russian in the German Labor Lyceum, 81st Street and Second Avenue, and in the Harlem River Casino, 107th Street and Second Avenue. He spoke at a meeting of New York Socialists and had a public debate with Hillquit in the Forward Hall, 175 East Broadway. Trotsky and Bukharin also took an active part in the meetings called by the small group of dissident Socialists who were trying to work out plans for a more effective voice in the Socialist movement. Trotsky's last speech was on March 26th, a day before he left on a Norwegian ship for Russia. Bukharin sailed for Russia a few weeks later.⁺⁶

It was Trotsky who was instrumental in converting Ludwig Lore, editor of the Socialist *New Yorker Volkszeitung*, to Communism. He also influenced a number of Jewish Socialists, particularly Morris Winchefskey, the "grandfather" of Yiddish Socialist literature, and A. S. Sachs, educator and sociologist; the latter never became a Communist. Trotsky's and Bukharin's articles were followed intently by the Jewish immigrant youth

TROTSKY'S QUARREL WITH THE FORWARD

Trotsky's forceful personality, self-righteousness and intellectual arrogance led to a clash with Ab. Cahan, himself a domineering personality who thrived on fights.

During Trotsky's short stay in this country, the *Forward* printed a few of his articles. Aside from airing his views, they provided him with a few badly needed dollars.

On the morning of March 1, 1917, the State Department exposed a German plot to embroil Mexico and Japan in a war against this country. B. Charney-Vladek, then city editor of the *Forward*, penned a few lines to give vent to his indignation. They were printed in a box at the top of the front page.

If Germany is actually embarking on this idiotic course, . . . which smacks of medieval darkness, then every citizen and every

resident of the United States will fight to protect the great American republic against an alliance of European and Asiatic monarchies and their associates.

Barely a couple of hours after the paper was on the street, Trotsky stormed into Editor Cahan's office. A few minutes later, loud voices were heard from there, Cahan and Trotsky shouting at each other in Russian. Trotsky, flushed with anger, soon rushed out, and left without saying good-bye to anyone.^{*17} He later sent a letter to Cahan severing all relations with the *Forward*.^{* +7}

The Bolshevik Revolution ushered in an idyllic unanimity in the Socialist movement, at least on the surface. Unit after unit of the SP surrendered to its spell. There was hardly any division on this score. No Right-Winger would have dared openly to speak his mind against the Bolsheviks, to say nothing of the middle-of-the-roaders, who labored not to lag too far behind the Left in professing enthusiasm for the Soviets. Men of varying temperament and attitudes—Hillquit, Algernon Lee, Eugene V. Debs, James Oneal, August Claessens—spoke warmly of the Bolsheviks and defended their use of violence as unavoidable in a revolution. Oneal approved of the Bolsheviks in his speech at the Brownsville Labor Lyceum as late as November 7, 1919.^{*18} Only a few hard-boiled Mensheviks such as Dr. Anna Ingerman and Joseph Shaplen, who visited Soviet Russia, had the courage to challenge the victorious Bolsheviks. So did David Schub.

This spell was not limited to New York or to the East. A mass meeting in the Chicago Coliseum, January 1919, to launch the Socialist mayoralty campaign erupted in a stormy demonstration for Soviet Russia the moment the first speaker mentioned the word "Bolsheviki," the assembled 8,000 forgetting the original purpose that had brought them together.^{*19}

SHAPING THE LEFT WING, 1919

It took the Left Wing nearly two years to take organizational form. The pattern was laid down at the New York City conference, February 15, 1919, and at the national conference in New York, June 21st of the same year.

At the city conference, held in the Rand School, all leading local

* This incident was erroneously given in *Jewish Labor in U.S.A., 1914-1952* as occurring a day after America declared war on Germany.

Left-Wingers were present. John Reed, recently returned from Lenin's Russia full of admiration for the revolution he had witnessed, was there too.

After heated discussions, an executive committee was elected, consisting of Benjamin Gitlow, Nicholas I. Hourwich, George Lehman, James Larkin, L. Himmelfarb, Benjamin Corsor, Edward Lindgren and Maximilian Cohen. Headquarters were opened at 43 West 29th Street. (Several of the participants later disappeared from Left-Wing and Communist activities.)

The Manifesto and Program of the Left Wing Section Socialist Party, Local Greater New York was published in the *Revolutionary Age* of March 22, 1919. It bore little or no relations to the actual conditions in this country. The only cognizance taken by the Left of things American was determined opposition to the AFL, resolutions for revolutionary trade unions and for a vigorous struggle to unmask bourgeois democracy. The manifesto embodied Louis C. Fraina's program article, "Problems of American Socialism," in the first issue of the *Class Struggle*, February 1919.

In April, the *New York Communist* appeared, edited by John Reed. The second issue already had an editorial board, two of its four members from the Russian Federation.

An application blank was issued for those in the party wishing to join the Left Wing. The agents of the Lusk State Committee to Investigate Seditious Activities, who raided the headquarters on June 21, 1919, took away 2,000 signed applications.

The Manifesto and Program was adopted by the Left Wing groups in most of the other cities too.

About a hundred participated in the national conference.⁺⁸ Meeting several months after the first congress of the Third (Communist) International, March 2-6, 1919, in Moscow, the conference could tread on sure ground. It had only to copy the program of the highest authority, adding a few paragraphs condemning American imperialism, American democracy, reformism, the AFL and the SP.

SPECTOR OF COMMUNISM HOVERS OVER EUROPE

To appreciate the revolutionary flamboyancy of the manifestos, one must not lose sight of the social restlessness prevailing in Europe after the end of hostilities. The challenging statement of the

Communist Manifesto, "The specter of Communism is haunting Europe," visionary in 1848, sounded prophetic and real to many eager ears in 1918-1920. The great human dislocation and the tremendous social tensions accumulated during the four war years set in motion a succession of revolutionary outbreaks, both of a national and social nature. New smaller states were rising on the wreckage of the two empires in Eastern and Central Europe, and within their still shaky structures internecine warfare raged over their social-political content.

In the defeated countries the unrest seemed to reach the boiling point. In January 1919, the Spartacus Bund held Berlin for ten days; in March, Bela Kun proclaimed a Soviet republic in Hungary; in April, Gustav Landauer and his friends, Ernest Toler among them, declared a Soviet republic in Bavaria.

The general restlessness did not by-pass American labor. Here, too, workers were clamoring for the higher goals pledged by the war President. And their pent-up energies were released after the war in a round of big strikes; the most important, in steel and coal. For the first time, this country witnessed a paralyzing general strike, in Seattle, Washington, January 21, 1919, an action in support of striking marine workers. There was also a general strike in Winnipeg, Canada, in the same year.

The ground swell of political dissatisfaction ripened in many parts into talk of a third party, a farmer and labor party. Such parties were actually organized in several states in the Northwest. Nationalization was seriously discussed by the unions in two vital industries, coal mining and railroads. The AFL could not escape this ferment either. At its convention of June 1919, in Atlantic City, the AFL adopted a program proudly claimed to be the "most complete and the most constructive proposal made in this country for the reconstruction period."²⁰ But the only two "complete" demands were the right to organize and the cessation of immigration for at least two years.

Neither the wave of strikes nor the political agitation could, on sober reflection, be regarded as potential prerequisites for a revolutionary crisis in America. The high production and full employment, that had not stopped immediately after the war, as anticipated by many—obviously no sign of weakness in the economic system—did not dampen the revolutionary fervor of the Left. Four

thousand miles away from Europe, the Left, largely a youthful element and overwhelmingly foreign-born, was intoxicated by the revolutionary potentials there.

"GOOD FOR RUSSIA BUT UNSUITED FOR AMERICA"

The internal struggle in the SP now entered a second stage. At stake was control of the party itself. There was hardly a unit in any area that avoided the long exhausting meetings and acrimonious debates, often lasting until dawn. And these were usually preceded by caucuses to map strategy. Fist fights and rolling on the floor were not uncommon.

The Left now demanded full acceptance of the Bolshevik line. The Rights were labeled Scheidemann's and Noske's or counter-revolutionaries and Kolchaks—varying with the temperament of the accuser. And the middle-of-the-roaders were called Centrists, only a few shades less insulting than the former. As usual in inter-party strife, the initiative was with the aggressive opposition. It branched out, creating its own organization within the party.

The attitude of the leadership and their supporters could be summed up in one sentence: *The Soviet state is good for Russia but unsuited for America.* Some honestly failed to see any danger in such a view, while for others it was a mere subterfuge not to alienate the rank and file. However, this pro-Soviet sentiment threw them into a weak defensive position.

An example of this frame of mind—or tactic—was the telegram sent by the SP convention, September 1919, in Chicago, to Ludwig C. A. K. Martens, Soviet representative here. The message ended with: *THE PROLETARIAN REPUBLIC IS AN INSPIRATION TO US.*²¹

This lip service to Communism in Russia, a stratagem to check it here, continued for a few years after the split with the Communists. A famous leader of the Bund, Vladimir Medem, who arrived in this country in 1921, warned the delegates to the convention of the Socialist Federation of the same year to steer clear of the uncritical and unprincipled stand adopted by most Socialists. He said in effect: Once a Socialist accepts the premise that the Communists have created a workers' state in Russia he is helping the cause of Communism here. Once a Socialist surrenders to the principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat for one country, he opens the

door to a discussion about the correctness of applying it to the rest of the world. There can be no compromise on the fundamental principle of democracy, a cornerstone of Socialist thought.²²

Medem's warning was ignored. The Socialist press was practically closed on anti-Bolsheviks until 1923. This double standard was not a monopoly of the Socialists. A substantial, if not a major, section of liberal public opinion, typified by the *Nation* and *New Republic*, were wholeheartedly pro-Soviet for Russia though they were against Communism for America.

The same approach prevailed in Medem's own party in Poland—this had prompted Medem and A. Litwak to migrate to America—and in other Socialist parties. Jean Longuet, grandson of Karl Marx, reviewing in the New York *Forward* the Communist split at the convention of the French Socialist Party, in January 1921, mixed a clearcut opposition to Communism with admiration for the Soviet regime.²³ In another article from France, October 2, 1921, Longuet wrote approvingly of the decision of the French trade unions against the Communist Profintern, at the same time continuing to favor the Soviets. And Longuet represented the Centrists.

An explanation of this strange attitude might be looked for in the internal situation of the given countries. Paris and Warsaw, for example, were foremost in the *Cordon Sanitaire* policy against Soviet Russia. The Socialist and labor movement, forced to fight their conservative governments, could ill afford unanimity with them on any major policy issue. As a leading European Socialist put it years later, "Soviet Russia appearing as a thorn in the side of our ruling reactionaries, we could do nothing else but defend it." One may add to this expediency the sentiment of many Socialists for a regime pledged to create a classless society, though its means to that end were unpalatable.

Still, this pro-Sovietism increased confusion among Socialist followers and favored Communist penetration into labor and radical bodies.