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# What is the “Left Wing” Movement and Its Purpose?

by Edward Lindgren

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This question is agitating hundreds of members of the Socialist Party at this time.

Since the memorable night when the Central Committees of the various locals of New York City held a conference, at which half of the delegates bolted and adjourned to another hall and there organized themselves into a “Left Wing” group of the party, it has been a perplexing question, and the party machinery, held in control by reactionary officials, paid organizers and speakers and other parasites who cling like leeches to the socialist pie-counter, have endeavored to squelch this exhibition of indignation and anger of the rank and file by holding private meetings of “good,” “loyal” comrades, for the purpose of saving the party from “IWWism,” “anarchy,” and the devil knows what. Indeed, going to the extent of using their influence with the party press to have them deny their columns for notices of meetings or statements of principles and tactics as long as the name “Left Wing” is used.

Apparently the bolt was brought about by the chairman refusing to grant the floor to a number of delegates, who wanted to question Algeron Lee, leader of the Socialist group in the Board of Aldermen, on the question of voting an \$80,000 appropriation for a “Victory Arch”; and the attitude of the Socialist leader, “that it had been a mistake in squandering so much of the people’s money, but that there were no socialist principles involved.”

However, these were but contributory causes.

Its origin has a more fundamental basis. While for years there have been factions in the party no real line-up was taken until 1912, when half of the party membership was read out of the party by the infamous clause known as the “sabotage” section of the Socialist Party constitution. At that time the reactionaries were left in control, as they believed for good. But the question was one of principles and could not be killed by official proclamations or by expelling members who refused to accept it. Logically, one reactionary step must be followed by others, and the party plunged deeper and deeper into the mire of vacillating policies, of opportunism and reforms; compromising the revolutionary position it should have occupied as a Socialist party, for a vote-catching policy, based on social reform issues, aimed exclusively at electing candidates to office, no matter who the candidates were or their stand on the class struggle.

When the test came in 1914 for a showdown as to the quality and quantity of socialist idealism and principles in the party, that happened what any socialist could have predicted who was familiar with opportunism and its result: The leaders of the party vied with each other in finding excuses for their co-patriots in Europe — who were voting appropriations to their various governments for carrying on the war — pleading with the party membership that internationalism in wartime must give way to nationalism; that the worker’s immediate concern was “his job, his home, and his country.” It left the rank and file aghast and

bewildered. The leaders in whom they had had implicit faith, whom they had cheered and acknowledged as the true exponents of internationalism, had failed miserably when the time came to uphold that which they had expounded to be the true philosophy of the proletariat.

A convention was demanded by the rank and file of the party. It was held, and in no uncertain manner declared its position. The result was the now world-famous St. Louis Resolution. It was sent for a referendum vote and adopted by an overwhelming majority.

Was the question settled? No!

The party machinery was still in the hands of the opportunist apologists for the European parliamentarians, and, of course, it would interfere with their program of social reforms should they insist upon elected officials carrying out the spirit of the resolution. The result was that throughout the entire country, with a few exceptions, the elected officials voted and worked for war appropriations and other measures pertaining to the war.

To many members of the party, as well as the people in general, it meant the death of the socialist movement. They were mistaken, it was not the death of the socialist movement, but the death of that slimy, treacherous creature, known in the world of politics as the parliamentarian, who in the guise of practical politics had misled the workers the world over to believe that socialists in a capitalist legislature can, by working for social reforms, introduce a socialist industrial state.

It has taken the party membership a long time to realize the fallacy of such action. Russia with its Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, Germany with its Majority Socialists and Spartacus groups have clarified the atmosphere. Where a few years ago only those who remained close to socialist principles could see it, today, almost anyone who understands the theory of the class struggle has no trouble in comprehending the reason why comrades are fighting and slaying each other and that opportunism must necessarily create a division in

the ranks of the socialist movement — for that which should be a means to an end is made the end itself.

The "Left Wing" group is the logical outcome of a dissatisfied membership — a membership that has been taught by the revolutionary activities of the European movements "to compromise is to lose." And hold, with the founders of modern socialism, that there are two classes in society; that between these two classes a struggle must go on, until the working class seizes the instruments of production and distribution, abolishes the capitalist state, and establishes the dictatorship of the proletariat. They will not wait until the vast majority of the people will vote them into power. But — if the proletariat during its struggle with the bourgeoisie is compelled by the force of circumstances to organize itself as a class, if, by means of a revolution, it makes itself the ruling class, and, as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production — then it will, with these methods, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class-antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.

The Socialist Party has been too flexible where it ought to have been firm, and too rigid where it ought to have been flexible. The Soviet government of Russia is very flexible and therefore it succeeds. It is inflexible only on the fundamental class question; the dictatorship of the proletariat is the basis of its flexibility. And so with our own socialist movement. The class struggle and the class struggle alone must be the basis of its flexibility.

On the basis of the class struggle must it reorganize itself, must prepare to come to grips with the master class during the difficult period of capitalist reconstruction now going on. It can do so only by teaching the working class the position it faces — it must preach revolutionary industrial unionism and political action and urge the workers to develop their craft unions into industrial

unions. It must carry on its political campaigns not as a means of electing officials to the legislature (as they have done in the past), but as year-around educational campaigns for the enlightenment of the working class to class-conscious economic and political action and keeping the revolutionary fervor alive as a flaming ideal in the hearts of the people.

The "Left Wing" group therefore believes "that the time has come for the Socialist Party of America to throw off its parliamentary shackles and stand squarely behind the Soviet Republic of Russia and the revolutionary movements of Europe. That it will thus be enabled, when the time comes — and it is soon coming — to take the leadership of the revolutionary proletariat in its struggle with the capitalist class. Instead of standing in its path dangling the bait of parliamentary reforms, push them forward towards the dictatorship of the proletariat, the final phase of the class struggle, transient and necessary to the ushering in of the Cooperative Commonwealth."

### **Tentative Program.**

That we stand for the abolition of the social reform planks of the Socialist Party, together with all present municipal, state, and congressional platforms.

That we teach, propagate, and agitate exclusively for the overthrow of the capitalist state.

That the Socialist candidates elected shall adhere strictly to the above two provisions.

Realizing that the Socialist Party of itself cannot reorganize and reconstruct the industrial organization of the working class; that that is the task of the economic organizations of the working class themselves, we demand that the party must assist this process of reorganization by a pro-

paganda for revolutionary industrial unionism as a part of its general activities. We believe it is the mission of the socialist movement to encourage and assist a proletariat to adopt newer and more effective forms of organization and to stir it into newer and more revolutionary modes of action.

That the press be party-owned and controlled.

That all the educational institutions be party-owned and controlled.

That the party scrap its obsolete literature and publish new literature in keeping with the policies and tactics above mentioned.

### **Immediate Demands.**

We demand that the NEC of the party call an immediate Emergency National Convention.

We demand that the NEC shall not issue credentials to the three delegates selected to go to the international conference at Lausanne, Switzerland.

We demand that the SP of A issue a call for an international congress of those groups of the socialist movement who participated in the Zimmerwald conference in September 1915 and the Kienthal conference in 1916 and those groups that are in sympathy with them today.

We demand the unequivocal endorsement of the Revolutionary Government of Russia.

We demand the unequivocal endorsement of the Spartacus group in Germany.

We demand the unequivocal endorsement of the Left Wing movements in Europe.

We demand the Socialist Party come out for the release of all political and industrial prisoners.

Apply to Edward Lindgren, 350 Halsey Street, Brooklyn, New York, for further information.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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