
Right, Center, and Left.

by Dennis E. Batt

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The modern labor movement appears to be developing as many “wings” as an aeroplane. Properly speaking there can be but one wing to the socialist movement, for as the workers advance in their knowledge of the socialist philosophy there can be no doubt as the “wing” they will line up with. Just now we are confronted with the difficulty of absorbing a great number of “November Bolsheviks” and it behooves us to carry on more actively the educational work that is essential before we can ever hope to accomplish the emancipation of our class. We find that the socialist movement is divided into three sections, known as the “Right,” “Center,” and “Left” wings. The events in Europe since the breakdown of the Second International (which was neither international nor socialist) have called attention to the fact that there was something wrong with the makeup of the socialist movement. In Europe the so-called Right and Center clearly showed their counterrevolutionary character. If we are to profit by the events which have taken place “over there,” it is necessary that we understand which groups in our own movement represent counterrevolutionary tendencies.

We find that socialists of the Ebert and Scheidemann type in Europe have always taken a reactionary attitude; this was well known long ago to those who understand the real nature of socialism. Their acceptance of internationalism and the Marxian philosophy was never more than mere formality. We have had and still have their counterpart in this country. The national programs of

the Socialist Party have been programs of reformism. The sole aim has been to make the conditions of the workers’ slavery a little more endurable. The Social-Democratic Party of Germany was an ideal organization in the eyes of our “leaders,” who have endeavored to follow in the footsteps of those who are today recognized as the most dangerous of all enemies to the workers. Their aim was and is to build a great vote-catching machine. To this end they have prostituted all their efforts; they have consciously and deliberately obscured the class character of the socialist movement. One has to go back no farther than their recent call for a convention of all the freaks in the country — the infamous “Amnesty Convention” which is to be held in Chicago. This is a deliberate attempt to obscure the class nature of the workers’ fight to free class war prisoners. No measures proposed by this group (which is properly called the Right) seriously menaces the continued existence of the capitalist system. In fact, any or all of their proposals could be endorsed by an intelligent and progressive capitalist as measures that would patch up the existing system and make it last a bit longer. This group, which is represented by [Victor] Berger, [John] Work, [Adolph] Germer, [Seymour] Stedman, and others, is even now working to prevent the class character of the movement from being exposed. Stedman, at least, has worked for the alliance of the Socialist Party and the Non-Partisan League. The “yellow” character of Berger’s socialism is too well-known to need any comment. In discussion with their defenders one will be con-

fronted with the statement that because the government has feared them enough to put them in jail they must be real socialists. We refuse, however, to accept the judgment of some stupid government official as a criterion of the caliber of the socialist. A jail sentence will not serve as a substitute for a clean record. Kerensky and Breshkovskaya were both jailed repeatedly, and anarchists without number have been imprisoned, yet their counterrevolutionary bend is undeniable.

The "Center" presents another problem. It has but recently assumed any importance in America. This group presents an even greater problem than the Right. In general, the Centrists agree in part with the program of the revolutionary socialists, but the points in which they do not agree are the most important. The Center socialist possesses a natural tendency to compromise with the reactionists of the Right; in this they are actuated by the fond hope that they can use the Right to further revolutionary organization and propaganda, whereas in reality it is the reverse — the Center is used by the Right to further their reactionary schemes. They justify their action by a plea for "harmony and unity," but there can be no harmony or unity in the workers' movement except that which springs from a clear understanding of the socialist position. Those who urge the compromising of fundamental principles in order to get the support of reactionary elements are surely urging us to lean upon a broken reed. We must not fall into the trap but must at all times insist upon a clear and definite working class stand.

That the rank and file is beginning to realize this is evidenced by the fact that everywhere Left Wing groups are springing into existence. Manifestos issued by these new groups show a lack of grasp of socialist tactics, yet their intention is clear. Each and every one is an attempt to get away from the vote-catching methods which the party has used in the past. Seeing the proletarian revolution in action they have realized that the pure-and-simple parliamentary socialists are not to be

relied upon in times of stress. Because of the very manner in which these newly forming Left Wing groups have acquired their affection for the uncompromising socialist tactics there is danger that they will allow themselves to be used for reactionary purposes. A great many of the individuals in these groups have been attracted upon purely emotional grounds and as yet have not a proper understanding of the questions at issue. Nevertheless, the trend is in the right direction and unless we allow enthusiasm to get in the best of our heads we will succeed in placing the Socialist Party upon a sound basis.

As one looks over the different manifestos which have recently been issued, the thought arises that there is a danger that the Left Wing tendency now developing may swing to the other side of the arc and become as reactionary in one direction as the Right is in the other. Space does not permit a detailed analysis of the various manifestos, yet a general tendency may be noted. All seem to be predicated upon the idea that the revolution is right around the corner. They seem to lose sight of the fact that the capitalist system as it exists in this country shows no signs of collapse in the immediate future; at least there seems to be no evidence of weakness. It may be a case where the wish is father to the thought. There is also a tendency in some of these manifestos to lose sight of the political factor and lean toward the anarchist position. We must not forget that the first thing which the workers must do is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class. We must gain control of the political state. With a few notable exceptions the manifestos which have come to our attention have either ignored or slighted this factor.

As a basis for the successful accomplishment of their own emancipation the workers must have an understanding of the class nature of society. Consequently the thing that we must concern ourselves with most at this time is the spreading of this knowledge among the workers. This is our

first duty as socialists.

The proletarian revolution in action has demonstrated the necessity of gaining control of the state power. We are deceiving ourselves if we neglect the work necessary for the conquest of political power.

This is the most critical period the socialist movement has ever faced, and it behooves us to work harder than ever before. We must spread the knowledge of the class nature of society and this cannot be done by merely stating that governments are used in the interest of the class which controls them. To understand the function of the state it is necessary that we study the laws underlying social development. While every workingman cannot be expected to become a thorough student of socialism, it is necessary at least for those who are sufficiently class conscious to belong to the Socialist Party to be familiar with the fundamental principles upon which the socialist move-

ment is based. This need for study is being met all over the country by the organization of study classes. This work should be encouraged by every socialist who has the best interest of the movement in mind, for by that means alone will we eventually clarify it.

The Party is growing fast. It is by the study route alone that we will be able to assimilate the newcomers into the movement. The immediate future is pregnant with possibility for securing the organization for socialism. It would be a great calamity if we were to reject opportunism only to turn to the other extreme of reaction. This can be prevented if study classes are started in all Locals so that the membership may have opportunity to become informed on the fundamentals of socialism. If we train the newcomers in our ranks and school them in the work of training others then the future belongs to us.

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