
The Open Communist Party — The Task of the Hour.

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The Russian proletarian revolution could hardly have come at a more critical time in the history of the socialist movement.

All over the world the revolutionary proletariat had lost faith in the old methods of the Social Democracy and in its leaders.

It found them suspicious of everything they had upheld in the past, because the past had brought about the demoralization of the socialist movement.

The pendulum of socialist opinion, which had swung so far to the right, was about to swing equally far to the left.

All over the world the working class was drifting, rudderless.

The Appeal from Russia.

Into this situation the November 1917 Revolution in Russia burst like a bombshell.

It carried us off our feet by its daring. It gave back to us our lost ideals.

Its powerful romantic appeal bore us away from a world of hopeless, cheerless realities, in a flood of enthusiasm.

It was the one positive point in a world of negations, the one ray of light in all this hopeless demoralization.

To that part of the international movement that had definitely severed its allegiance to the social-patriotic leaders of the war period, Russia became what Germany had been in the past.

Just as the German movement had been the “alpha and omega” of socialist wisdom in the Second International, so now Russia, its methods, its experiences, its theories, stood in the foreground of socialist

thought.

Leftism — An Infantile Disease.

When the American Socialist Party was divided in Chicago in 1919, and the Communist and Communist Labor Parties were founded, this Russian influence had already been condensed into a concrete philosophy.

The newly organized Third (Communist) International had adopted a platform upon which it hoped to unite the revolutionary minorities all over the world.

An outgrowth of the first epoch of the Russian Revolution, it stressed those features of the revolutionary struggle which Lenin later described in his famous pamphlet *Radicalism, the Infantile Disease of Communism*.

This “radicalism” spoke contemptuously of mass movements and called for small, intensely class-conscious organizations that should take upon themselves the leadership in the approaching struggle against world capitalism.

It demanded the organization of new, class-conscious labor organizations that should completely demolish the old, existing bodies.

Two Communist Parties Here.

This program was the basis upon which both the Communist Labor Party and the Communist Party built their platforms. In principle there was no difference between the two parties. The difference lay almost wholly in the temperament of their respective leaders.

The Communist Labor Party still tried to adjust

its activity somewhat to American realities. The Communist Party through and acted as if the Russian Revolution had been bodily transplanted upon American soil.

These parties had barely begun to organize when the well known persecutions and raids (Jan. 1, 1921) descended upon their headquarters, their meetings, and their individual members.

The first attack drove the communist movement into hiding. And up to the present day, it has not emerged from its hiding place.

The Romanticism of Revolution.

The idea of a secret organization was not forced upon the communist movement by Palmer and his cohorts, however.

It had been lurking in the minds of most communist enthusiasts ever since the outbreak of the Russian Revolution.

The Russian movement, which had just achieved so monumental a victory, had been a movement of secret organizations.

From the beginning of the war, even the sanest had been inclined to flirt with the idea of an underground movement.

It was a part of the atmosphere of revolution and romanticism that the Russian upheaval had created.

But even in Russia, romance has had to give way to brutal realities. The world revolution failed to materialize. Instead, world imperialism has emerged, for the moment more powerful than ever before.

The fantastic dream that a small minority of determined revolutionists may overturn capitalism and lead the proletariat into a communist state of society has vanished into thin air before the bitter experiences of the German and the Italian communist uprisings.

Demand Mass Movements.

Russia, too, is paying the price. The great mass of uneducated, indifferent, and even counterrevolutionary workers and peasants is hanging like a millstone about its neck.

In Russia the period of the proletarian dictatorship, that necessary and inevitable forerunner of a communist society, will extend over many years, perhaps

over decades, because the November Revolution found the masses of Russia unprepared to receive its message.

By the same token, the Third International has learned. It no longer dreams of small minorities but demands mass movements.

It has deserted its policy of splendid isolation on the industrial field and demands that its adherents carry their agitation into the strongholds of conservative unionism.

It openly condemns the agitation for armed insurrection and open rebellion in countries where the revolution is still in the distant future and insists that the communist movement, in every country, must proceed at once to the creation of an open, aboveboard mass movement for the purpose of educating the proletariat and permeating it with communist ideals.

Menace of Secret Movement.

Nothing could have done more harm to the Communist movement in America than the secrecy which the action of the Department of Justice provoked it to adopt.

A secret movement under the conditions that exist at the present time is a menace to the mental integrity of the party organization. A crisis, such as the one through which we are passing, demands constant reorientation and readjustment on the part of each and every member of the organization, as well as in the organization itself.

To demand unswerving allegiance to a set of doctrines that tomorrow may prove false encourages unthinking, slavish obedience.

To permit a small group of officials to dictate these doctrines to the organization, by giving them the power that they necessarily must have in an underground organization, means to establish a party hierarchy that will sooner or later demoralize the best of its leaders and dangerously weaken the virility and stamina of the movement.

Must Reach the Workers.

From the point of view of propaganda, the step the communist movement has taken is equally disas-

trous.

Two years have taught us the hopelessness of reaching the American workers through so-called "Illegal" organizations.

In Russia, under the regime of the Tsar, the secret organization prospered and grew because the great mass, however indifferent it might be, was secretly in sympathy with every revolutionary movement that threatened its oppressors.

In America, the great public has no patience with secret political organizations.

It still believes that the Constitution provides opportunity for the outlet of all shades and variations of opinion, and is definitely out of sympathy with any movement that fights behind a closed visor.

Feeling of False Security.

Finally, the secret organization is its own greatest enemy.

In the main its secrets, though carefully kept from the membership, become, in a short time, the property of the authorities, thanks to the espionage system that is its inevitable accompaniment.

On the other hand the feeling of false security that such an underground organization creates offers a rich field for the numerous romantic irresponsibles, who will become particularly active in a movement of that character.

Illegality becomes the end and aim instead of a necessity.

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THE WORKERS COUNCIL OF THE UNITED STATES, therefore, while it is fundamentally in accord with the position of the third Interna-

tional, as formulated in its recent Third Congress at Moscow, and while it is in agreement with the theoretical position of the communist movement in America, emphatically denies the wisdom and the need of secret organizations for the propagation of Communism in America at the present time.

It calls upon the membership of this movement to join forces with them in an earnest attempt to create the open, above-ground organization that alone will be able to reach the masses who still turn a deaf ear to our message.

Field of Great Possibilities.

Before us lies a field of unlimited possibilities.

The Socialist Party is rapidly disintegrating. The men and women who are leaving its ranks are ready to join us.

The thousands who have fallen by the wayside since the split in Chicago two years ago will rally to our banners.

Let us call them.

Let us offer them an organization in which they can do effective work, work that counts, work that will reach the men and women who are spending their lives in hopeless dissatisfaction with capitalist exploitation.

There could be no better time. Raise your voices, Comrades. Come out of your cellars into the open. Go to your brothers in the mills, the mines, and the factories, and talk to them openly, fearlessly.

Bring them into your meetings. Get them to join your movement. For the words of Karl Marx still hold good:

"The emancipation of the proletariat must be the work of the working class."

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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