
Manifesto of the Socialist Propaganda League of America. (January 1918)

Published as "A Program of Revolutionary Socialism" in *The Revolutionary Age* [Boston], v. 1, no. 21 (March 8, 1919), pg. 8. The introductory section was probably written by editor Louis C. Fraina.

[Introduction, written March 1919]

In its call for an International Communist Congress of revolutionary Socialism, the Communist Party of Russia (Bolsheviki) includes "the elements of the Left Wing of the American Socialist Party (tendency represented by E.V. Debs and the *Socialist Propaganda League*.)"

The Socialist Propaganda League was organized about four years ago. In January 1917 it began to issue a weekly paper, *The Internationalist*, which in May 1917 became *The New Internationalist* with Louis C. Fraina as editor. The League and *The New Internationalist* represented the extreme left of the American movement; it accepted the Bolshevik program long before the Bolsheviki conquered power; *The New Internationalist* favored the Bolsheviki at a time when no other American Socialist paper did, at a time when the New York *Call* editorially stigmatized the Bolsheviki as "anarchists." The League was the only American Socialist organization to agitate in favor of the Soviet proposal for an armistice on all belligerent fronts issued in December 1917.

It is interesting to note that, when they were in this country Alexandra Kollontai, N.I. Bukharin, and F. Rosin, all of whom occupy high positions in the Soviet government, were members of the Socialist Propaganda League. The principles of the organization are elaborated in Fraina's book *Revolutionary Socialism*, authorized and issued by the Central Executive Committee of the League. The League is still in existence, but its paper is no

longer published, since *The Revolutionary Age* expresses its policy.

In January 1918 the Socialist Propaganda League issued a Manifesto incorporating its principles and tactics, which follows in full:

[Manifesto of January 1918]

1. *The SPLA accepts the new forms and tactics of the class struggle against Capitalism.*

Imperialism unites all layers of the ruling class into one general mass of reactionary interests; the small and formerly independent capitalist groups cease their struggles against Big Capital, and compromise in Imperialism. Moreover, the policy of Imperialism merges skilled labor and the "liberal" petite bourgeoisie into the imperialistic state, making the great industrial proletariat of unskilled labor, the typical product of concentrated Capitalism, the immediate and potential revolutionary class upon which Socialism must build for Social Revolution. The new forms of the class struggle mean no compromise whatever with any non-proletarian social groups, mean the unrelenting, uncompromising struggle against Capitalism and all its overt and covert allies. Revolutionary Socialism rejects any and all "entangling alliances."

2. *The SPLA accepts the Social Revolution as the basis for its immediate demands in the class struggle.*

Capitalism is not an abstraction, it is a concrete force. To avoid the everyday struggle against

Capitalism by rejecting immediate demands means that Socialism becomes ipso facto either a bourgeois proposition, or a sect for the propaganda of dogmatic affirmations. Our immediate demands, however, are not demands made in a dicker with the capitalist state, but demands that will be the first measures introduced by the "dictatorship of the proletariat" in the process of the Social Revolution. The Social Revolution is no longer an aspiration of the future; it is a fact of immediate, palpitant reality, and must determine our immediate policy and tactics. Our immediate demands accordingly are measures calculated to develop the moral and physical class consciousness of the proletariat, preparing the proletariat for the general revolutionary struggle.

3. The SPLA strives for the unity of industrial action and Socialist politics into the general mass action of the proletariat and of revolutionary Socialism.

Through revolutionary parliamentary action the proletariat meets the bourgeoisie in a general political class struggle, and parliamentary action, if aggressively Socialist, may actively promote the general revolutionary struggle; through its industrial unions, the proletariat organizes more efficiently for the immediate struggle against Capitalism, builds the material economic instrument that in the preliminary period of the Social Revolution may seize and operate industry, and which integrates the general struggle of the proletariat, and projects the mold of the industrial government of communist Socialism; through mass action the proletariat unites all its forms of action into one dynamic struggle, rallies for revolutionary struggle the great mass of unorganized workers, and organizes into one general revolutionary movement all the latent powers of the proletariat for action and the conquest of power. Moreover, through mass action the proletariat becomes the arbiter of its own activity, and breaks through the conservatism of entrenched organizations and

opportunist officials. The unity of all means of proletarian action is an indispensable condition for the Social Revolution.

4. The SPLA stands for direct industrial and political action of the workers with full control by the rank and file of all representatives and offices.

Until the workers consciously and directly carry on their industrial and political struggles, confusion and compromise will persist. Democracy, the democracy of mass action and control, is absolutely necessary. Direct industrial action means mass action. No dependence upon "leaders" and dickerings with the employers; the workers must act as a mass, independently and aggressively. Direct political action means policies inseparably united with the industrial struggle, politics free from any taint of compromise, opportunism, or dickering with the capitalist state.

5. The SPLA opposes all forms of opportunism, social-imperialism, and social-patriotism, and particularly opposes the insidious opportunism operating under the guise of Marxian phrases.

Socialism is everywhere divided into three groups: the right, the avowed adherents of war, Imperialism, and a policy of bringing "Socialism" by the cooperation of classes; the center, the representative of an atrophied Marxism which is neither revolutionary nor of Marx, and which, precisely because it uses revolutionary Marxian phrases in its criticism of the right but refuses to accept the new conditions of Socialist policy, is particularly dangerous; and the left, the group of revolutionary Socialism in theory and practice, which cleaves firmly to the class struggle and international solidarity of the proletariat, and which adapts its policy to the new revolutionary epoch. No compromise, no bourgeois opportunist tactics, but the immediate revolutionary struggle against Capitalism in practice as determined by the conditions of immediate action developing into the general mass action of the Social Revolution.

6. The SPLA denounces bourgeois democracy, bourgeois disarmament, and a "league of nations" as means calculated to deceive the workers and perpetuate Capitalism.

Bourgeois democracy is a fraud in itself, and under Imperialism promotes the most brutal interests of the ruling class. Disarmament under Capitalism is an imperialistic proposition; the workers must acquire the armaments for their own purposes. Armament of the proletariat is necessary to disarm the bourgeoisie, establish the Revolution, defend the Revolution against attacks of non-Socialist nations, and to conquer the bourgeoisie of other nations in cooperation with its proletariat. Disarmament can only be the policy of a Socialist state after all Socialist states have organized into a proletarian league of nations. Moreover, democracy becomes the last bulwark of defense of Capitalism, shaken by the oncoming proletarian revolution, democracy is used to mislead the masses. The Social Revolution, through the dictatorship of the proletariat, annihilates bourgeois democracy, annihilates all the institutions, ideology, and social superstitions of the bourgeois regime in the process of making the revolution and establishing the society of communist Socialism, in which alone full and free democracy may function through the abolition of all class distinctions and class rule.

7. The SPLA recognizes that Imperialism and State Capitalism are one and indivisible, meaning the climax of the power of Capitalism and the capitalist state.

Imperialism means Capitalism at the climax of its development; State Capitalism is the government form of expression of Imperialism, uniting all non-proletarian groups within the state and against the proletariat of unskilled labor, and, moreover, establishing a new, more general and international form of industrial concentration attainable only through state control. State Capitalism is not Socialism, and never can become So-

cialism. Against Imperialism and State Capitalism, which intensify the subjection and exploitation of the proletariat, there must be waged an aggressive, unrelenting struggle through industrial unions and mass action. Imperialism and State Capitalism must be overthrown, and substituted by industrial self-government of the workers.

8. The SPLA urges upon the proletariat cooperation with such groups and classes in colonies and "backward countries," which are the objectives of Imperialism, that wage the struggle against exploitation and imperialistic Capitalism.

Imperialism internationalizes the class struggle, and Imperialism must be fought by means of the international class struggle of the proletariat. We must carry on the struggle against Imperialism by waging aggressively the class struggle within our own national frontiers; and we must carry on the struggle against Imperialism by arousing and cooperating with the proletarian class struggle in the "undeveloped countries," which Imperialism seeks to subjugate and exploit. This implies the international solidarity of the proletariat in action.

9. The SPLA opposes all imperialist wars and favors all revolutionary wars of the oppressed against the oppressors, and for Socialism.

Imperialistic wars are waged exclusively for aggression and for the more intensive exploitation of the world proletariat. The "defense of the country" under Imperialism is a fraud: its purpose is to enlist the enthusiasm and moral energy of the masses for conquest and spoilation. Revolutionary wars waged by the revolutionary proletariat for revolutionary purposes are, however, in strict accord with Socialism and the aspirations of the international proletariat.

10. The SPLA urges the organization of Councils of Workers in the preliminary stages of the Social Revolution.

The revolution of the proletariat annihilates

the parliamentary regime and its state. The parliamentary regime is the expression of bourgeois democracy; its division of functions into legislative and executive is a necessary, deceptive means of acting against the opposition — the legislature talks and represents the pretence of “democracy,” while the executive acts autocratically. The proletarian revolution cannot seize hold of the ready-made machinery of the state and use it for its own purpose: this machinery of the bourgeois state is destroyed. A new form of government must be organized, consisting of the industrially organized workers, uniting democratically within itself the functions of legislative and executive — as was done by the proletarian revolution in Russia.

11. The SPLA organizes to wage a struggle on two fronts, inside and outside the Socialist Party.

The organization is formed to work in the Socialist Party as well as independently of the party. The task ahead is the revolutionary reorganization of the American Socialist movement. We do not confine our efforts within the Socialist Party, however, because our purpose is to arouse the general mass action of the proletariat out of which revolutions arise, and consequently our organization is constantly in contact with the struggles and aspirations of the industrial proletariat.

12. The SPLA pledges itself to support a new Socialist International, the immediate purposes and policy of which shall be in accord with the new revolutionary epoch; which shall, consequently, reject any and all compromise and shall wage the international class struggle through the general revolutionary mass action of the proletariat.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2005. • Free reproduction permitted.