
The Crisis and the Socialist Party

by Louis C. Fraina

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Unsigned article attributed to editor Louis Fraina.

The international situation is becoming more suggestive, more potential of great success or infinite disaster. And events are moving swiftly; the history of a day is now equivalent to the history of tens of normal years.

The European proletariat is preparing itself for the final struggle against Capitalism and Imperialism. The proletariat in Russia has conquered definitely; the proletariat in Germany and Austria is on the verge of conquering all power for the revolutionary dictatorship of Socialism. But the class struggle within any one nation inevitably produces reactions in other nations; and while Socialism is conquering in Russia and Germany, the sinister forces of international Imperialism are proposing — and preparing — an attack upon the Socialist nations by means of intervention.

These intervention proposals constitute a problem of the utmost gravity, and a call to consistent, aggressive action by Socialism and the proletariat of all nations.

The coming of peace is...

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...a peace that not only would destroy the great hopes aroused by the coming of Socialism in those

two nations, but that would carry within itself the threat of new wars. Victory produces a tendency toward reaction, inevitably; and this tendency might conceivably be strong enough to impose its will upon the peace conference. When the war ceases, the real struggle started; and instead of peace being a call to “taking things easy,” it is a call to action.

In and through all these problems runs the red thread of the great issue between Socialism and Capitalism.

Already, reaction is shaping itself here. The Mooney case is a challenge, and the vicious insult of “clemency” is a new challenge to the proletariat. Reactionary peace terms are being proposed, the campaign for larger armaments is acquiring enormous proportions.

Action is developing against Socialism and independent proletarian activity. The coming industrial crisis will disarrange industry and cause enormous unemployment. The coming year or two will bring the mightiest strikes and industrial struggles in the history of this country.... And through it all runs the red thread of the emerging final struggle between Socialism and Capitalism.

It is necessary in this crisis to study every peculiar alignment of the great struggle, national



and international, to adapt our aspirations to immediate activity, developing reserves for the final conquest of power.... In this crisis, the Socialist Party as represented by its national administration, is not measuring to the opportunity.

We must, moreover, get down to the fact that the industrial proletariat is the basis of Socialist action, that the shops, the mills, and the mines and the centers of proletarian activity. We must impress upon the workers that their control of industry constitutes their real power, that they must speak in the aggressive accents of industrial might. Out of the mass strikes of the proletariat, carrying a political object, emerges the power of the proletariat, that class power which alone annihilates Capitalism.

It is necessary that we study the alignment of forces in the labor movement, that we secure a concentration of the radical forces. The great requirement is the unity of Socialist and proletarian force upon a common platform and policy against Capitalism.

The problems are enormous, the requirements severe; it is a situation that tests the energy and the initiative, the intelligence and the audacity of Socialism.... But the Socialist Party, as a party, is silent, inert.

Never, in the experience of our movement, has a greater opportunity offered itself; never could a concentration of forces and a real struggle against Capitalism develop more than at this moment.

Instinctively, locals and individual members of the Socialist Party are reacting to the great opportunity. But they are scattered; there is no unity of action or purpose, no centralization of the activity of the party.

Mighty currents of ideas and of action are pulsing through the party, the germinal sap of new ideals producing a new life. But the party, as expressed through its national administration, is not, it must bitterly be confessed, measuring to the opportunity. The party, *as a party*, is not unified, vocal, definite.

Never, in the history of the world, have more momentous events developed than during the past two months. The crash of thrones and of Capitalism, the coming of peace with all its hopes and fears, the development of revolutionary Socialism in action, the emergence of the international class struggle between Socialism and Capitalism — these are unprecedented historical events, the realization in life of the concepts of Socialism. Two months — in which hours represented years, in which every minute issued a call to international Socialism — and our National Executive Committee has been silent, inert.

It is tragic. It is symptomatic of the imperative necessity of the concentration of forces within our own party as a preliminary to the concentration of the general forces of the proletariat.

The Socialist Party is pulsing with life and new ideals. But there is no focus; there is not the necessary concentration in a unified policy.

The great task before our party is a task of education and interpretation, of intensive propaganda on a national basis, clear and coordinated. This coordination can be secured only through the national administration, but the administration is silent and inactive on these momentous issues.

The Socialist movements in France, Italy, and Great Britain, are vocal, having formulated a general policy; which is still a policy, whether one agrees with it or not. Clarity and the formulation of a clear program is an absolute necessity at this moment; but our party is laggard in this vital matter. Events at any moment may precipitate the convocation of an international Socialist Congress; what sort of Congress shall our party participate in and what shall be its proposals?

It is not sufficient to say that our delegates would represent us; these delegates should have definite instruction; and at this moment, these are lacking. Nor is it sufficient to leave this vital matter to the National Executive Committee: its attitude during the past 2 epochal months demon-

strates its lack of initiative and energy. *The membership must speak.*

The Socialist Party resolution on the war, adopted at St. Louis in April 1917, is no longer a policy since the coming of peace. It is now a historic document, which, in spite of many defects, is a credit to the party and which has linked up our party with the radical minority in the Socialist movement of France and Great Britain, and with the splendid Socialist Party of Italy. It is now necessary to supplement this document, to formulate the implication of the class policy it expresses as a new program.

An Emergency Convention of the Socialist Party is the only body that can adequately express the attitude of the membership on the momentous events that are at present shaping the destiny of the generations to come. No machinery now at the disposal of the movement is qualified to act at this moment. The spokesmen of the Socialist Party must be elected by the members, elected for the sole purpose of speaking upon the specific issues of the crisis through which the world is now passing. No time should be lost in calling together such a body: an Emergency Convention should be summoned immediately.

The National Executive Committee, at its coming session, will probably issue a declaration on the international situation. That is not enough; the problems before our party go much deeper, the requirements are broader, than the mere issuance of a declaration. Should the National Ex-

ecutive Committee have issued the party's declaration on the war, instead of the St. Louis Convention [April 7-14, 1917], the declaration would not have expressed the will of the membership, would not have been vital, aggressive, historic.

The problems that this convention would discuss are fundamental. There is the problem of an international policy, of a national campaign of education and interpretation of events in Europe, of a campaign against the sinister proposals of the intervention, of the coming epoch of great industrial strikes, of unifying the party upon the basis of a definite, unequivocal program of international Socialism, of reconstructing the party organizations ravaged by the persecutions of the war.

The European Socialist movements have held regular conventions during the war; our party has not since the American declaration of war. The European movement has held, is holding, conventions to discuss problems of policy and action; our party should do the same.

An Emergency National Convention would accelerate the development of the party, would place the party upon its feet, would concentrate the energy and action of the party locals, would prepare the Socialist Party to concentrate the awakening forces of the proletariat. An Emergency National Convention is necessary; it would prove a historic event, the first chapter in a new book to be written by the Socialist Party.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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