
A Left Wing — And Why: A Statement of Cause and Effect.

by N.S. Reichenthal

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Editor of *The Call*:

I do not belong to the wing and am opposed to the “state within the state” as far as the Socialist Party is concerned. But neither am I of the “loyalist,” conservative type which cries “Treason! Sedition!” and other approved and worm-eaten catch words when the least word of opposition to the powers that be or to things as they are is raised.

Those who have so far come out against the so-called “Left Wing” element have proven nothing. Like real Jesuits they have hurled epithets and charges, merely. To these critics, all those who are crudely attempting to change or modify party policy and tactics are rank disrupters, anarchists, or syndicalists. And the only remedy suggested is “raus mit them!” They are “spies, in the pay of somebody,” etc., etc.

Doesn't it all sound very, very familiar though? The whole Socialist Party, its spokesmen, the pacifists, the IWW — all liberals who were opposed to the war-makers were “in the pay of Germany,” were “traitors.” Hang 'em, lynch 'em, deport, expel, or at least put them in jail for 20 years. It's the same spirit, the same lack of understanding for the feeling and sentiments of differing groups or individuals, combined with a sublime ignorance as to the fundamental thing's cause and effect. It is also sadly reminiscent of a bit of socialist history, now 20 years old, when the rebellion against the policy of DeLeon with the Socialist Labor Party became irresistible. Then, too, all the kickers were “fakers,” “hirelings,” and “base traitors.” When the inevitable “split” came, DeLeon “proved” to his own satisfaction and for that of his fanatical hero-worshippers that Tammany Hall was at the root of it all, and that, in fact, the “Kangaroo” Party, or what might then have been called the “Right Wing,” was organized in the

back of a Tammany saloon with Tammany heelers as sponsors and guiders.

It was this hysterical lying on the part of DeLeon and his howling dervishes which brock the backbone of his efforts to be the real leader of socialism in America and which drove hundreds and thousands of hitherto impartial, undecided socialists into the ranks of the new organization. This was the beginning of and the end of the Socialist Labor Party as an organization and factor in American constructive socialism.

Therefore, comrades, let's stop talking nonsense and imitating DeLeon and our own dear Security League. Let's discuss principles and tactics, not personalities and hare-brained metaphysics. Cause and effect — bear that in mind!

Now, is there a cause or are there any prerequisites for this “Left Wing”? Or to any justified opposition to party policies, principles, and tactics? Here are the complaints which produce the effects, the basis that gives this so-called “Left Wing” its motive power:

Say these Left Wingers: Study the national platform of 1900. See the attempts to make it more “American,” more practical, until we come down to the one adopted in 1917, and you will see that all reference to internationalism, to the party itself being the “Left Wing” of the international proletariat striving to overthrow the capitalist state, is entirely eliminated. All this was done to calm and lure the practical “American” elements — the farmers, single-taxers, prohibitionists, the liberals, etc. If you scrutinize the platform, you will clearly see the tendency to appease, to compromise. We have allowed ourselves to become converted to “American ideas” and politics, and all for the purpose — to gain votes.

Then take the state and municipal platforms and

demands. You will observe the same tendencies. Every particularistic element in the state or municipality is catered to, a bid is made for the votes of all the groups, all are hitched in a grand hodge-podge to the bandwagon of socialism, and the immediate demands and palliatives become bewildering. This has gone on and on until now these printed platforms and demands, when issued for propaganda purposes, defeat their own ends, teeming with bulky verbalism and “reform” talk, instead of being first, a clear, concise exposition of our fundamental principles — the things which distinguish the Socialist Party from the capitalist and the reform elements — and then making one bold stand in the one great issue which is agitating the minds of the people at that particular time. Such hazy principles and platforms must of necessity lay the foundations for Socialist Party members hobnobbing and compromising with the various Farmers’ Alliances, Non-Partisan Leagues, with so-called Labor Parties, and this results in our elected officials turning out to be plain, ordinary “social reformers.”

Furthermore, look at these officials elected to Congress, state legislatures, municipal councils, boards of aldermen, or as mayors of cities. With just a few commendable exceptions, they’ve all “gone wrong.” It perhaps would not be well to investigate into this too closely or to assert positively that this is due to either the reformistic tendency in our platforms or to the great game of playing politics. Or, perhaps, the cause lies in the lack of these elected individuals of real faith, real conviction and backbone and a subsequent submission to parliamentary compromise. They are contaminated by the persuasive “nicety,” the “diplomacy,” and the congeniality of the men elected by the capitalist and reform parties, who, “after all, you know, are not such bad fellows.” Let it suffice to say that the results are disappointing and very disheartening, and seem to justify the conclusions arrived at by some that mere parliamentary action as encouraged and practiced by the Socialist Party is a snare and a delusion.

My own reserved opinion would perhaps lead me to conclude that it is largely a question of the caliber of the individuals elected. Here, for instance, is a Lunn, and there is a Seidel, as mayor. The first an educated reverend, an ambitious, outspoken opportunist. The second, a sincere, well-trained socialist. The first “makes good” for himself, the other “makes good” for

socialism. Then take the two Congressmen, Meyer London and Victor Berger, the one a trained socialist understood to be a thoroughgoing revolutionary, sound and uncompromising. The other, Berger, is considered a rank opportunist and reformer. Meyer London degenerates into an office-seeker and spokesman for the “Democratic” administration, while Berger unquestionably made good. His record as Congressman stands out in bold relief and is a credit to the party, while London’s is disgraceful. This, of course, may be due to the fact that Berger is an “actor” — he acts while in Congress, while in Milwaukee, organizing the Social Democratic machine and its successful campaigns, he acts on the National Committee, at party conventions, and at People’s Councils and conferences. And he acts at his trial for sedition, trying to prove that though he opposes the war, he nevertheless bought Liberty Bonds, but, unfortunately, lost the receipt showing payment.

In Chicago and Cleveland the Socialist councilmen (that is, the aldermen) show the white feather and submit to a camouflaged, corrupt environment and Tammany patriotism on a vital question growing out of the St. Louis declaration. Now, the New York aldermen are old-timers — thought to be immune from this sort of conflagration of fraud and flim-flam. The Western and Midwestern men haven’t that long record of Socialist affiliation and training, yet the latter “come clean!” Is it, perhaps, a question revolving on the difference in spirit between the Eastern and Western movement? The answer must be “No.” For witness the many mayors, councilmen, judges, etc., that have “fallen for it” out there, and have compromised and betrayed their trust. There is, for instance, the Socialist city administration in that same old Milwaukee, with Mayor Hoan. We are also told that the Socialist county attorney there has prosecuted and convicted certain workers, and one of the heaviest guns he brought against them before the jury was the horrifying discovery that in the meeting-place where these men — socialists, anarchists, and IWW — convened the pictures of Bakunin and Lenin ornamented the walls.

Then there is Van Lear, who compromises with everyone and everything as long as it tends to secure him in office.

Now, then, what is the party doing in such cases

of violation? Nothing but sawing wood. Watchfully waiting, and just letting things drift along, afraid to take the necessary, decisive steps, because it may injure the vote-getting! What did the party do to London after his betrayal? Why, it just went and renominated him, afraid of the political effect. In the case of Lunn, we acted, and, though we lost votes, we at least saved our souls and retained our self-respect. And the party in Schenectady is coming back. What did the party do with the “patriots” when they began to desert to the enemy, though still holding Socialist Party membership? Why, it tolerated them and advertised them, afraid to act, hedging and marking time and giving these renegades the opportunity to “resign” and be acclaimed by the reptile press as simon-pure patriots, and r-r-eal Americans. What did the party do in the case of Russia when the Kerensky regime showed unmistakably that it was nothing but a bourgeois imperialistic clique? It accepted it as the Russian socialist revolutionary government! And when the Russian workers and peasants overthrew this regime? Again the party hesitated and hedged — not a word of encouragement when it was most needed. Only after a very long time, and spurred by the stand of our “representative” in congress, who came out for the counterrevolution, and against the workers’ republic, did the party meekly make an effort to repudiate him, and thus take some kind of action for which the red-blooded members of the party had been vainly wailing.

And what did the party and its officials do when the “democratic” government put on the screws good and proper? It submitted spinelessly, instead of becoming more aggressively defiant; it crawled and hedged and scrambled under cover, all but repudiating the great, historical St. Louis declaration — a declaration which will remain everlastingly the greatest utterance of the greatest time by fearless men and women of the Socialist Party. If the party never did anything else before or after, history will justify its existence on that score alone. But how did our officials uphold that stand when taken to task? When tried for “treason”? Again the real fighters in the movement wanted bold action, defiance, and an upholding of the faith we proclaimed. But most of them tried frantically to save their own skins, “passed the buck,” and tried to prove that they did not obstruct, that they bought Liberty Bonds or encouraged their sale; that they organized Red Cross

drives or that they did not object to these in the national offices! How different this was to Liebknecht’s stand, to that of the Italian Socialist Party, and to our own Gene Debs!

There is *The Call*, says the Left Wing. From mild opposition, it finally became almost a Democratic administration paper or a jingo war organ in its news, editorial, and advertising columns. Remember the headlines about “drives,” “smashes,” and “wipings out,” the bond ads, and Liberty Loan rallies, even those arranged by the renegades of the American imperialists? And the editorials unqualifiedly endorsing Wilson’s peace talks and notes, apparently forgetting all about the baffling contradictions and inconsistencies between words and deeds from that quarter before and during the war. Of course, it will be said that *The Call* had to compromise, had to fawn a bit and strive to please, or it would otherwise have been suppressed. But the fact is that *The Call* has not been suppressed since it takes a more aggressive stand, not to mention the fact that its circulation has increased since its change of attitude. Nevertheless, the paper is still lacking in its international outlook, and it still fails to interpret in many respects the international and domestic news and the problems that come with it in a way that would satisfy the militant, uncompromising elements. That is why, point out the Left Wingers, *The Revolutionary Age* already has a circulation of almost 30,000.

Then take our stand on the trade union policy. This was the main cause for the separation from the Socialist Labor Party 20 years ago. We jumped from one extreme to another before we called names, organized dual unions, and justified the actions on the principles of the class struggle, revolutionary action, etc. Then we became mere apologists for Gompers’ unionism, and our policy compelled us to keep silent or defend many rotten deeds on the part of certain unions and their officials. The fact is that many of our open air and indoor meetings were mere trade union meetings. Many speakers did nothing more than urge their hearers to join some union. This policy resulted in several things, among which was the 1912-1913 fight within the party, with its “Haywoodism” and the sabotage clause, the leaving of the party by hundreds and thousands of IWW workers and sympathizers, the opening of the doors for trade unionism, pure and simple, and for opportunism and plain politics.

And the net proceeds, again, of this was Chester Wright of *The Call*, who developed into a simple (if not altogether pure) unionist, missing fire on his socialism and going over to the “practical” side of politics, the very faction which is now the loudest opponent of the Socialist Party and its work. Thus was the famous “boring from within” policy turned into a boomerang. Our own men, sent there by our resolutions, got so absorbed with the “boring” process that they bored themselves into offices with attendant “pelf” and easy snaps, which the Socialist Party did not have to offer. Names need not be mentioned — just let them pass in review in your own mind. What a galaxy of “Revolutionary Socialists” that “had been.” There are still other fruits of this policy of trade unionism — that is, the American Alliance for Democracy and labor and the new American Labor Party. Both of these spurious organizations would not have gained their respectability, and could not become the power for confusion they are for the working class of America, were it not for the former socialists so prominent in their midst.

Again, in New York particularly, the party policy and tactics fluctuate according to the whims of certain elements in what is called the East Side, though in reality not confined to that section of the city. The policy of this group is never fixed — now “revolutionary,” then again opportunistic and “practical,” at times emphatically nationalistic, and at others international. Here it is calm and callous to everything, and there it is sentimental, hysterical, and frantic — either extremely ultra-IWW or deliberately sane and conservatively “loyal.” In 1917, it shouts for Hillquit and the Socialist Party, and in 1918 it peddles Liberty Bonds and carries on a campaign for volunteers for the British army for “rescuing Palestine!” Day before yesterday, it embraced a “good” party, yesterday a “good” issue, and today a “good” man! Perhaps it is because this faction pays for the piping that the party and the press, especially, seem afraid to boldly lay down the law as occasion demands. Again the Left Wing claims that the party in New York (Manhattan) is so reformistic and moderate because of the preponderance of professional and business elements in control of the organization. Lawyers, doctors, dentists, teachers, and businessmen determine the policy and tactics, and, therefore, the workers, the great unwashed,

have no show at all. The latter lacking the polished speakers.

The fact is that Locals Kings and Queens are what may be termed more “revolutionary” and uncompromising. Whether it is because the professional class and the businessmen are not in control I am not prepared to say. It may be that they are more utopian and less practical than Local New York. But is it an accident that Local New York has, up to this date, not held a single Liebknecht-Luxemburg memorial meeting? Is it also an accident that while “Babushka” [Ekaterina Breshkovskaya] and her meetings were boosted, meetings addressed by the real Russian revolutionary elements are ignored — meetings that gather the heart and soul of the transplanted Russian proletariat in vibrating enthusiasm, devotion, and self-sacrifice?

It is pointed out, too, that during the last campaign our press and our candidates for office were running a race with the capitalist press and politicians as to which could talk louder and longer about the Kaiser. We frantically tried to prove an alibi — that we hated the Kaiser more, and that we denounced him long before they did. We repeated the stupid talk of the browbeaten ignoramuses; we defended and apologized and shouted “loyalty,” instead of shouting from the housetops of fraud, hypocrisy of the labor-skinners and sham patriots, and of attacking again and again and proclaiming that the Kaiser was not the only evil — that, while Kaiserism hysteria was being pulled off, the masters were stealing march after march on the American working class, manufacturing laws and entrenchments and bulwarks of Tsardom more than a trifle worse than Kaiserism and Prussianism. Such a campaign would have compensated us for all the votes lost; it would have made the awakening somewhat sooner, even if we had lost more than we did in votes.

Now, this is the bill of particulars on the part of the Left Wingers, I think. That’s why they are making their efforts to remodel the party according to their likings and their feelings. It may be that some are jumping the traces, shooting above the mark; it may be that even the most vociferous, the most “revolutionary” among them would not have done better or more if placed in responsible positions, particularly during the trying times if they found their skins in danger. It may be that each and every one of them is wrong in every last particular; that it’s largely a question of difference

in temperament, environment, and character. But, whatever it is, the cry of “Treason!” “Disruption!” “Throw ’em out!” is pure nonsense, and will not help matters, just as the extradition and deportation of IWW and Socialists will not save capitalism from the coming of socialism. Cause and effect — that’s all.

Now, as to myself, I’m not giving my case. The reasons, large and small, which I have endeavored to analyze are not all mine. I have merely attempted, like a good attorney who marshals and elaborates an admitted case before a jury — only showing the causes, the provocations, which led his client to do what was done, pleading self-preservation or the unwritten law! But I don’t want to hide my own stand behind a lot of verbiage.

At least in the fundamental respects I agree with the Left Wingers. I have changed my mind about our trade union policy and about what was called “Haywoodism” — that is, mere political action, or making the party nothing more than a political machine for nominating and running — or electing — candidates for political office. I have changed my views and I am not ashamed to say so. The comrades who know my record within the party know that when these questions were up for decision, when the IWW first organized, and in 1912-1913, when Haywoodism was besetting the party, I took an active part on the “Right” side. Those of you who don’t know me, look up the files of *The Call* and the *Volkszeitung* and refer to the minutes of the party meetings in New York, Brooklyn, Buffalo, Steubenville, Ohio, and you will see that I did my share to combat and defeat these two tendencies at that time.

But times have changed! We live in the midst of the revolution. Only action, revolutionary action, counts. Those who refuse to change their views in spite of what is happening will be left behind, no matter how useful they were to the movement. Phrases, theories, dogmas based allegedly on “pure Marxism” will be laughed out of court by the surging, irresistible forces of the proletariat. It is the tragedy of the Mensheviks that they insist on being the only simon-pur Marxists, and they want the Allies to interfere in Russian affairs because the Bolsheviks don’t go exactly as Marx or Kautsky or Plekhanov dictated in their books as to how the revolution must be brought about! It was pitiful, for instance, to see how Joseph Shaplen sweated

and labored in a recent debate, quoting and re quoting from Kautsky, Plekhanov, and Ehrlich (all, of course, basing their stand on Marx) trying to prove why the Bolsheviks must not rule, and should not rule, and why there must not be socialism in Russia now. Why, the authorities explicitly said that it is impossible — first, we must have capitalism full-fledged in Russia — capitalism, mind you, no half-way, no pygmy capitalism, but a big, vast, imperial kind. The Russian workers must put it in the saddle, so that they may have socialism in 50 years from now! And all this in the name of Marx! But Messrs. Lenin and Trotsky really put on Kautsky’s “Seven-League Boots” and jumped over the “necessary” full sway of the bourgeoisie, and established the rule of the workers! The war brought on a revolution and overthrow of the Tsar, and then the one “reactionary mass” showed that it was utterly unable to accomplish anything except to embark on a campaign of imperialism under a new name and firm. And the workers tired of it all. Through “uneducated” and advised by such men as Lenin and Trotsky, they apparently decided to benefit by what they already knew of full-fledged capitalism in Germany, England, France, and especially in our United States. They determined to save themselves the suffering, the shame, and the slow starvation, the robbery, adulteration, and the brutalities.

An upheaval placed two alternatives before them — and they concluded that they would rule, instead of allowing the bourgeoisie to try their hand at it first, for, say fifty or a hundred years. And that’s why the imperialists and the Mensheviks of the world will never forgive them — no, never!

The Russian Bolsheviks have demonstrated what a resolute, though “ignorant,” proletariat and peasantry can do. No more waiting for “something to turn up;” the workers everywhere instinctively acclaim Bolshevism, because it means action, not mere politics, talk, and theory. The Babushkas, Plekhanovs, Scheidemanns and Eberts, the Victor Adlers, Brantings, Greulichs, et al., and each of their prototypes here in this country, have had their day. They theorized and educated and did useful work. But action — that is what the workers look for now!

The Left Wingers have the right to be heard on these questions. Crudely and openly they came out and said they wanted to organize. That’s their mis-

take. Perhaps they should have met secretly and decided to “capture” the party by approved methods. However, we can’t, because of their frank attempt to openly organize, refuse them access to our press, or meet them with such slurs as that “somebody” is paying them to disrupt the party, or charge them with a conspiracy.

If they are breaking up the party, then those who flirt with the new Labor Party and take part in its steering and organization surely are breaking it up. Let those comrades who feel as I have endeavored to analyze get together and discuss and debate. In 1899 the Yorkville Agitation Committee have no other function but to call the members together and discuss and argue on what was then doing in the Socialist Labor Party. And even DeLeon’s efficient and autocratic machine did not attempt to stop this discussion or expel the instigators. That these debates were the prelude to the “split” which took place soon after is another story, they were not the cause of the “split.”

It may be said with justification that these discussions worked manifestly for the “split,” because no other avenue was left open to change the policy which held the socialist movement behind the Chinese wall of bigotry, intolerance, billingsgate, and slander.

Of course, I realize that there are always excesses on either side in cases of this kind. But come on and discuss, show the Left Wingers that they are wrong; show them that you are traveling the same road, though putting on the breakers once in a while. Don’t stifle opposition by parliamentary tricks or by “reorganization.” Those were the good old weapons of DeLeon

and the Socialist Labor Party, and it lead to their undoing. Open the columns of our press to announcements of their meetings, then let them go ahead. If they are wrong and have “something up their sleeve,” they will soon expose themselves. Trust to the sound judgment of the comrades who always stood by the party in all its crises. They will before long be able to separate the goats from the sheep. If it is good policy to advertise for pay Spargo, Slobodin, and the other renegades, when they arrange meetings and debates which tend to confuse and disrupt the socialists and radicals, and which are repugnant to all decent socialists, then it is also good policy to at least accept paid ads from the comrades who have grievances, though calling themselves “Left Wingers” — not to mention the insertion of their notices among other party news gratis.

The pretext that we cannot give them official recognition, as they are not an official subdivision of the party, is too “technical” and transparent, and, moreover, it will accomplish absolutely nothing. It won’t prevent their meeting and doing mischief, if that’s what they want. On the other hand, it will put the halo of martyrdom and persecution around them, which always helps any movement, right or wrong. But, unfortunately, those in authority always lack perception, a sense of proportion, and a sense of humor!

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