The Left Wing and the Revolution

By Louis C. Fraina

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THE distinguishing feature of the controversy in the Socialist Party between the Right Wing and the Left Wing, between the moderates and the revolutionists, is that the Right Wing refuses to develop and defend its *real* program. This is partly fear, partly camouflage, and partly sheer stupidity.

The moderates have a program, and a consistent program. It consists of parliamentarism, of reforming Capitalism out of existence, of municipalization and nationalization of industry on the basis of the bourgeois parliamentary state, of the theory that the coming of Socialism is the concern of all the classes,—in short, the policy of the moderates (which is in itself consistent, while inconsistent with fundamental Socialism) is a policy of *petit bourgeois*, "liberal" State Capitalism. But this policy broke down miserably under the test of the great crisis of Imperialism; it broke down under the test of the proletarian revolution, and revealed itself as fundamentally counter-revolutionary. But the moderates, essentially, still cling to this reactionary policy, although they are compelled by circumstances to disguise it, to camouflage it with cheap talk about "being left wing" and "a shift to the left" in the international movement, compelled to wait until "normal" times in order openly to defend their reactionary policy. So the moderates refuse to discuss the fundamentals of the Left Wing Manifesto and Program; they refuse to oppose their real policy to our's; they dare not. . . .

Accordingly, the Right Wing indulges either in vituperation of our revolutionary comrades, in threats of expulsion (guardians of the unity of the Party!), or in sophistry.

Characteristic of this sophistry was Algernon Lee's letter in the *Call* of April 2nd. Lee implies that the acceptance of the Left Wing policy depends upon an actual revolutionary crisis, and says:

> Have we reason to expect a revolutionary crisis in this country in the proximate future, aside from the possibility of such a crisis being voluntarily precipitated by one element or another? In such a crisis, if it should be precipitated (no matter by whom) would the majority of the people probably be actively with us or against us? Or would the majority remain neutral and inert, ready to accept the outcome of the combat between a revolutionary minority and a reactionary minority? In this latter case, taking into account only the supposed active minority, which of them would probably win in a decisive struggle at this time? On the basis of our answers to these questions, have we reason to seek or welcome a hastening of the crisis?
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> These are fundamental questions. Upon the answers we give to them must rest our decision on detailed problems of methods and tactics. They are unescapable questions.

It is important to understand the immediate "moment" in the great social struggle *as a basis for action*; but Lee uses it to make arguments *against* action.

The policy of the Left Wing, in general, which is the policy of revolutionary Socialism, is not a policy only for an actual revolutionary crisis. The tactics of the class struggle, of the unrelenting antagonism *on all issues* between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, function in "normal" as well as in "revolutionary" times.

It didn't require an actual revolutionary crisis to oppose the imperialistic war.

It didn't require a revolutionary crisis to make Lee's acceptance of the war "in order to save the Russian Revolution" a betrayal of Socialism.

It didn't require a revolutionary crisis to make Lee's voting for a "Liberty Arch," on which is inscribed "Murmansk" as a glory of the American troops, a betrayal of the international revolution in general, and the Soviet Republic in particular.

It doesn't require a revolutionary crisis to condemn the policy of petty-bourgeois reformism and compromise pursued by Algernon Lee and his confreres in the Board of Aldermen.

And it doesn't require an actual or immediate revolutionary crisis to accept the Manifesto and Program of the Left Wing; *but this acceptance is necessary for the immediate struggle of the moment, and as a preparation of our forces for the revolutionary struggle that is coming.* . . .

Let us discuss this problem more fully. It is necessary to completely expose the miserable arguments of the Right.

The Central concepts of Left Wing theory and practice are mass action and proletarian dictatorship. From these concepts flow three sets of tactics: before, during and after the Revolution. The immediate "moment" in the social struggle may compel a different emphasis; but the tactics are a unity, adaptable to the particular requirements of the social struggle.

Mass action implies the end of the exclusive concentration on parliamentary tactics. It implies awakening the industrial proletariat to action, the bringing of mass proletarian pressure upon the capitalist state to accomplish our purposes. It means shifting the centre of our activity from the parliaments to the shops and the streets, making our parliamentary activity simply a phase of mass action, until the actual revolution compels us completely to abandon parliamentarism. Mass action has its phases. It isn't necessary to have an actual revolution in order to use mass action,—before the final form of mass action we may use its preliminary forms, in which however, the final form is potential. Take, for example, our class war prisoners. It is necessary to compel their liberation. The Right Wing depends upon appeals to the Government which has imprisoned our comrades, upon liberal public opinion, upon co-operation with bourgeois and essentially reactionary organizations in "Amnesty" conventions,—upon everything except the aggressive mass effort of the proletariat. The Left Wing proposes *a mass political strike* to compel the liberation of our imprisoned comrades, to bring proletarian pressure upon the Government. Get the workers to down tools in the shops, march to other shops to pull out the workers there, get out in the streets in mass demonstration,—that is mass action we can use *now*, whether or not we are in an actual revolutionary crisis.

In proletarian dictatorship is implied the necessity of overthrowing the political parliamentary state, and after the conquest of power organizing a new proletarian state of the organized producers, of the federated Soviets. These concepts were implied (if not fully expressed) in revolutionary industrial unionism, which equally contained in itself the implication of mass action. Revolutionary industrial unionism placed parliamentarism in its proper perspective. The acceptance of and the propaganda for revolutionary industrial unionism did not require an actual revolutionary crisis. It required a revolutionary theory and practice (even refused to accept industrial unionism as necessary in the immediate economic struggle).

No! It is miserable sophistry to affirm that the Left Wing policy accords only with an actual revolution. That is precisely what the moderates in Europe said. When the war broke, the moderates (led by Scheidemann, Cunow, Plekhanov and Kautsky), declared that the Basel Manifesto had proven wrong in expecting an immediate revolution, that the masses had abandoned Socialism, therefore—they had to support an imperialistic war! But the Basel Manifesto did not assume an immediate revolution; it asserted that *war would bring an economic and social crisis, and that Socialism should use this crisis to hasten the coming of revolutionary action.*

The moderates in Germany said it was absurd to expect a revolution; and then they used all their power to *prevent* a revolution. And when the proletarian revolution loosed itself in action, the moderates acted consistently and ferociously against the revolutionary proletariat.

In Russia, the moderates said a proletarian revolution was impossible; but when it came, they acted against the revolution.

That is the attitude of the moderate Socialists everywhere, who are riveted with chains of iron to the bourgeois parliamentary state, who are absorbed in futile petty bourgeois reformism and the "gradual penetration of Socialism into Capitalism." Their arguments may appear plausible, until the test of the proletarian revolution reveals them as sophistry. Lee's arguments and policy are characteristic of the Scheidemanns, the Hendersons and the Vanderveldes. . . .

Imperialism, roughly, appeared in 1900; and with its appearance developed the revolt against parliamentary Socialism,—Syndicalism, Industrial Unionism, Mass Action, Bolshevism, the Left Wing. Imperialism, as the final stage of Capitalism, objectively introduced the Social-Revolutionary epoch. But the dominant moderate Socialism did not adapt its practice to the new requirements; and it broke down miserably under the test of the war and of the proletarian revolution.

The war was the expression of the economic contradictions of Capitalism, of the insoluble problems of Imperialism. It is clear that Capitalism is breaking down; that the proletarian revolution is conquering. Capitalism cannot adjust itself to the new conditions, cannot solve its enormous economic problems. The world of Capitalism *is* in a revolutionary crisis,—more acute in Europe, less acute in the United States, but still a crisis. This crisis, which is a consequence of the economic collapse of Capitalism, provides the opportunity for Socialism to marshall the iron battalions of the proletariat for action and the conquest of power.

The final struggle against Capitalism is on; it may last months, or years, or tens of years, but this is a revolutionary epoch imposing revolutionary tactics. And *revolutionary agitation is itself an act of revolution.*

It is not our job to "hasten" a revolutionary crisis. Capitalism itself takes care of that. Our job is to *prepare*. Our job is to act on the immediate problems —unemployment, the soldiers, strikes, class war prisoners—in the spirit of revolutionary Socialism, in this way *preparing* the final action.

The Left Wing Program is a program of *action*, not