The Left Wing Manifesto and Program

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Socialism and the War

THE Manifesto and Program of the Left Wing Section of the Socialist Party of New York City, which has been adopted by local after local of e Socialist Party, opens with an indictment of the olicy and practice of the dominant Socialism during ie war:

> The Social Democracies of Europe, unable or unwilling to meet the crisis [of the war], were themselves hurled into the conflagration, to be tempered or consumed by it.
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> Great demonstrations were held in every European country by Socialists protesting against their governments' declarations of war, and the mobilization for war. And we know that these demonstrations were rendered impotent by the complete surrender of the Socialist parliamentary leaders and the official Socialist press, with their "justifications" of "defensive wars" and the safeguarding of "democracy."
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> Why the sudden change of front? Why did the Socialist leaders in the parliament of the belligerents vote the war credits? Why did not moderate Socialism carry out the policy of the Basle Manifesto, namely: the converting of an imperialistic war into a civil war—into a proletarian revolution? Why did it either openly favor the war or adopt a policy of petty bourgeois pacifism?

The dominant moderate Socialism in Europe, that Socialism which was the heart and soul of the old International, accepted the war and entered the service of the governments. Moderate Socialism justified the war, abondoned the class struggle in favor of "class peace" for the successful waging of the war to national victory. In this is comprised the downfall, the collapse, of the Second International.

The representatives of moderate Socialism have adopted the policy of denying that there was any collapse of the International. They claim that Socialism in Europe *did* try to prevent war; that it did urge the the people against the war, denouncing it in unmeasured terms; *but that Socialism was not strong enough to prevent the war.* This is sheer sophistry. The question is not prevention of the war, but *accepting and justifying the war after war was declared.*

It is indisputable that the dominant Socialism in Europe divided along national lines, abandoning the class struggle. The majority Socialists of each belligerent group—except the Socialist of Italy and Serbia—denounced each other, declared to the proletariat that the waging of an imperialistic war was necessary to Socialism, that "victory" would promote proletarian interests. Socialism, the coming of the communist Republic, was made dependent upon Imperialism.

The dominant Socialism had repeatedly and emphatically denounced the coming general war as a predatory war of Imperialism, against which Socialism and the proletariat should act. They, the representatives of moderate Socialism, insisted again and again that the clash of international Imperialism was bound to produce a general war of horrible magnitude; that, accordingly, it was the task of Socialism and the proletariat to act against the war as reactionary, imperialistic and counter-revolutionary.

At the time of the first Balkan war, when Europe was threatened with a general conflagaration, there was held at Basel, Switzerland, an emergency International Socialist Congress, convened to act on the impending war. This congress, in its Manifesto, denounced the general war that might come as a war unjustifiable on any ground of national interests, as an imperialistic war; and emphasized that Socialism should use the political and economic crisis precipitated by the war to hasten the coming of Socialism, to develop the revolutionary struggle against the war and Capitalism. The Basel Manifesto clearly imposed upon Socialism, not only the necessity of opposing the war, but the necessity of using the war to weaken Capitalism and the state, to develop the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat.

The war that majority Socialism in Europe stigmatized as imperialistic in 1912, did come in 1914—the same war, produced by the same clash of Imperialism that might have precipitated war in 1912, or earlier at the time of the Agadir crisis. But majority Socialism reversed itself; instead of stigmatizing the war as imperialistic, it accepted the war as a war of national defense, justified it as a war for democracy!

The war originated in the same general causes that operated to produce antagonisms between the European powers. These causes consisted in the struggle for undeveloped territory, the industrial development of which might absorb the surplus capital which the highly developed nations had at their disposal. It was a struggle over Morocco, over Mesopotamia, over the Bagdad Railway, which had produced numerous diplomatic crises, and which finally flared up into war. The facts are conclusive. Socialist theory and Socialist investigation amply demonstrated the imperialistic character of the war.

The dominant moderate Socialism, however, reversing its previous indictment of the war, discarding all their concepts of Imperialism, justified the war as a war of "national defense." In one nation alone was this true, and that was Serbia; but there the Socialists opposed the war, recognizing that, with the intervention of the great powers, the war ceased to be a national war of Serbia and became a brutal imperialistic world war. The German Socialists, least of all, had the right to speak of a "national war," since Austria-Hungary's immediate purpose was the annihilation of Serbia's national independence.

The argument used by the "theoreticians" of moderate Socialism was that Socialism and Marxism acceped and justified wars of national defense. Precisely; but the question was not whether Socialism accepts wars of national defense, but *whether an imperialistic war is a war of national defense.* Imperialism is predatory; it annihilates national independense in its struggle for territorial and financial domination. The whole course of the war, the violation by each belligerent of all national "rights," (and now the character of the peace,) prove conclusively the predatory, imperialistic character of the war.

These "theoreticians" of moderate Socialism, moreover, used the fact that Marx accepted "wars of national independence" an argument in their favor. In Germany, Marx's words concerning the necessity of war against Russia were used to justify Germany's aggresion. But Marx was speaking of *revolutionary* national wars of liberation, of wars waged for national independence in the epoch of the revolutionary democracy of Capitalism, completing the abolition of feudalism. At the time Marx urged war against Russia, Czarism was the centre of reaction in Europe; and what Marx urged was a revolutionary democratic war against Russia, of which bourgeois society might have been capable at that time.

But since the days of Marx, the position of being the centre of reaction in Europe had been usurped by Imperial Germany *and by the Allies.* In other words, instead of the centre of reaction being feudal, Czarist Russia, the centre of reaction had become Imperialism, represented dominantly by Germany, Great Britain and France. "National defense" had become simply a screen behind which to hide sinister purposes of conquest, of Imperialism. Capitalism, at the stage of Imperialism, is in reaction against democracy; the annihilation of democracy is necessary for its purposes and supremacy. To imagine Imperialism capable of waging a revolutionary war of national defense and liberation, of producing a Garibaldi, is to confuse two totally dissimilar stages in the development of Capitalism. A revolutionary war of national defense and liberation, in our generation, can proceed only from a revolt of the oppressed colonial peoples dominated by Imperialism, equally the Imperialism of Germany, Great Britain and France; or from a revolutionary war waged by a Socialist Republic against international Capitalism.

The arguments of "national defense" and "democracy," accordingly, were sheer sophistry on the part of the "theoreticians" of moderate Socialism. Imperialism—and consequently the wars of Imperialism—is *against* national independence and democracy.

Moreover, the heart and soul of Socialism in action is the *class struggle.* To yield up the class struggle of the proletariat against Capitalism is to yield up Socialism.

This precisely what majority Socialism did in Europe: abandoned the class struggle in favor of the "national" struggle. This meant a surrender of the independence of the proletariat, of the integrity of Socialism.

The class struggle is fundamental. It is the dynamic factor upon which depends the coming of Socialism. It is the force that determines events, and the destiny of peoples. Separated from the class struggle, Socialism becomes simply an ideal aspiration, a disembodied spirit; abandoning the class struggle, the proletariat becomes the helpless prey of Capitalism. The class struggle "puts a bone" in the aspirations of Socialism; it is the final test of Socialism in action, the only means for the coming of Socialism.

This class struggle splits society, generating implacable class antagonisms. The clash of these antagonisms produces the onward march of historical events; determines the policy of the capitalist class, which is always conscious of class, and of the proletariat, which is not always conscious of its class policy. The coming of Socialism depends upon the conquest of power by the proletariat *through the class struggle.* End the class struggle, and you end the proletarian struggle to end Capitalism.

This class struggle operates during peace. This is admitted by the "theoreticians" of moderate Socialism. But during the war they developed a new theory: the class struggle prevails during peace, but is suspended during war, being merged in the national struggle.

Let us see. History shows that national struggles are a form of expressions of the class struggle. The revolutionary wars waged by France against feudal Europe were a national form of the class struggle waged between the capitalist class and the feudal class. The national wars of liberation were revolutionary class struggles. Instead of being suspended during war, the class struggle acquires new potency and significance.

War is the continuation of peace; the policy of a government during war is determined by its policy during peace: the two are inseparable. Moderate Socialism *during peace* indicted the imperialistic policy of the governments, but during the war they ascribed "democratic" and "liberating" purposes to these same governments. Apparently, according to moderate Socialism, all that a bourgeois government needs to do to become acceptable to Socialism is to declare war! The holy water of the Church was never as potent as this.

The theoretical implications of this acceptance and justification of the war means a break with the fundamentals of Socialism. The class struggle is fundamental to Socialism; but moderate Socialism insisted that national struggles were equally fundamental—a complete castration of Socialism. Moreover, seeing that national struggles in our days are an expression of Imperialism, it was logical to conclude that the coming of Socialism depends upon—Imperialism! This completed the cycle of the collapse of moderate Socialism in Europe,—this "Socialism" developing from ordinary social-patriotism into social-Imperialism.

The consequences were disastrous. Instead of using the war to weaken Capitalism and develop the revolutionary struggle, moderate Socialism used the war to strengthen Capitalism and the bourgeois state; to mobilize the proletariat in the service of Imperialism and *against* Socialism, to *prevent* a proletarian revolution. The suspension of the class struggle chained the proletariat with chains of iron to the war and the bourgeois state. Capitalism did not suspend the class struggle, it used the war to maintain its supremacy and break up the revolutionary movement of the proletariat. The governments consciously used moderate Socialism to mobilize the proletariat for the reactionary war, while the representatives of moderate Socialism developed into counter-revolutionary agents.

The war signalized the end of an epoch in Capitalism. It marked the coming to a head of the violent antagonisms of international Imperialism, a war in which the whole bourgeois society was thrown in the crucible of change. Capitalism, verging on collapse, unable to endure without Imperialism and unable to solve the problems of Imperialism without war, plunged the world into disaster. *The war was an expression of the capitalist class struggle against the proletariat,* since the stake was world power, and world power means power *over* the proletariat; and since victory, moreover, meant strengthening national Capitalism and the state as against a weakening of the class power of the proletariat. The war provided an opportunity for developing the revolutionary proletarian struggle against Capitalism.

The Basel Manifesto had guaged the situation accurately: the war would produce an economic and political crisis which Socialism should use to hasten the end of Capitalism; or, as the Bolsheviki expressed it in November, 1914—to convert the imperialistic war into a civil war of the oppressed against the oppressors, and for Socialism. The moderates resorted to lying in order to evade the implications of the Basel Manifesto: they declared that the Manifesto expected an *immediate* revolution upon the declaration of war; that there was no revolution, on the contrary, the masses abandoned Socialism; accordingly, they had—to accept the imperialistic war! This was base distortion. The Basel Manifesto did not expect an immediate revolution: all it expected was an economic and social crisis providing an opportunity for developing the revolutionary struggle against Capitalism; it wasn't the masses who abandoned Socialism as much as it was the dominant moderate Socialism abandoned the masses, delivered the masses as cannon-fodder to the governments.

The test of events exposed the sophistry of the moderates. When the Revolution did come, the moderates, who had previously based their policy on the refusal of the masses to make a revolution, now opposed the Revolution. They depended upon the national struggle; they depended upon Imperialism and the bourgeois state; the necessary consequence of their policy was to act *against* the proletarian revolution.

The Second International broke down under the test of the war. It broke down under the test of the proletarian revolution. Where it did not accept the war, its major elements opposed the war on the basis of petty bourgeois pacifism—the whole policy was a petty bourgeois policy. The petty bourgeois policy is dependent upon any and everything for the coming of Socialism except the class struggle and the revolution.