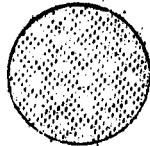


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THE SOCIALIST PARTY MOVES TO THE RIGHT



ANALYSIS OF THE 1936
CLEVELAND CONVENTION
and the
CAPITULATION OF THE
TROTSKYISTS to the
SOCIALIST PARTY.

REVOLUTIONARY WORKERS LEAGUE

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The Socialist Party as a caricature of the European Socialist Parties, has just concluded its nineteenth convention in Cleveland with 200 delegates present, representing approximately 14,500 members. The developments in the Socialist party of the U. S. have trailed behind the developments in Europe. As the outcome of the seizure of power by Hitler and his hordes, several important Socialist parties in Europe moved to the left. Following this the Socialist Party of the U.S. adopted the Detroit Declaration of Principles in 1934 and thereby gave new hope to Cannon and Shachtman, who stated at the Plenum of June, 1935 of the Workers Party that it was theoretically possible to reform the Socialist Party. This was merely the continuation of the line laid down by Trotsky in the New Orientation of the International Communist League. Leon Trotsky presented a new evaluation of the Socialist Parties, while our tendency stated that this development to the left in the Socialist parties was a conjunctural one, and in no way fundamentally altered the position and role of Social Democracy.

Since then important Socialist Parties of Europe have followed the footsteps of the Socialist Parties in the smaller countries and have moved to the right. In Belgium, France and Spain they have become the main force in these bourgeois democratic countries to save capitalism from communism and fascism. In reality they are paving the way for Fascism, as they did in Germany and Austria. Again on the heels of this development in Europe the Socialist Party convention in Cleveland moved far to the right.

Old Guard on the Offensive.

In comparing the 1936 struggle to the 1919 struggle, the outstanding political factor, which the majority has ignored in the fight between the Old Guard and the Militants, is the "little difference" that in 1919 the left wing took the offensive: it fought on program and principles. In 1936 the Old Guard took the offensive and fought on program and principles, while the Militants retreated and capitulated on program and moved far to the right.

"We Want Our Right Wing"

The Militant-Old Guard dispute resulted in the New York section of the Old Guard bolting the party and laying the basis for a new Social Democratic Federation. However, the belly-crawling and shameful action of the Militants and the silence of the so-called "Marxists" in the party have laid the basis for unity to be restored even further to the right of the Cleveland position. Thomas answered the Old Guard threat of split by stating at the convention that, "We want our right wing". "We want the right wing in the party." "We are for an all inclusive party." "I don't want to see them go." Zam goes this one better, when in the Feb. 8, Socialist Call, he says, "If real unity is ever to be achieved, it can only be on the basis of the mutual toleration of majority and minority."

Marxists understand that the ABC of unity depends upon programmatic agreement, and not "mutual toleration" - this concept will never achieve "REAL unity", that is, revolutionary unity. The different groups of Trotskyites who have liquidated their organizations and capitulated to the Socialist Party, also believe in "mutual toleration". In the whole period in which they have officially been members of the Socialist Party, not to speak of the faction they were infiltrating into the party long before their entry, not a single ONE of them has raised his voice to drive the social-patriots out of the party. Some of the social-patriots are in the ranks of the MILITANTS. Only the members of the Socialist Party who were collaborating with the Revolutionary Workers League raised this demand. For this action comrade Abe Krueger was expelled from the Militant caucus immediately after the Philadelphia meeting of the N. E. C.

The Militant Draft Program

The most important factor of the convention, although not the most exciting was the position adopted on programmatic and tactical questions. The Detroit Declaration had been the subject of a heated discussion in the party. In November, 1935, the Militants issued a Draft Program for the Socialist Party, -to the left of the Detroit Declaration, which is not saying much for it, considering its weak points. Besides a series of omissions on important issues of the day, the Draft Program has important errors of commission.

The program advocates a Farmer-Labor Party, has a class collaboration trade union line; advocates the reform of the Second International; advocates Organic Unity; presents a centrist position on War; reveals an inability to understand the question of Soviets; and, above all, has a revisionist position on the basic question of the road to power. On this question the draft says, "The working class, indeed, should prefer to come into power peacefully, and democratically, but that is an alternative which at the best is unlikely." In America, such a majority (parliamentary majority -H.O.) is a possible development in the event that a mass Labor Party is formed and has a rapid growth. These possibilities must be utilized to the fullest degree because of the obvious advantage of the legal right to control the governmental apparatus. This legal right will mean nothing, however, if the workers do not exercise their formal power, and build up, long before they take office, their extra-parliamentary machinery of defense against the inevitable counter-revolution." This means the workers will take POWER PEACEFULLY through the ballot and the present system of parliament, and the armed class will come afterwards when counter-revolution will try to drive the workers out. This is the classic formula of revisionism.

The programmatic offensive of the right wingers, particularly its Old Guard section, were so powerful that the Militants did not even present their Draft Program to the convention for consideration. They had already passed far to the right of this draft. In this way the Militants and "Marxists" hoped to avoid the discussion of programmatic and tactical questions. But under the pressure of the Right Wing the convention was forced to deal with these questions. The issues were buried by the leaders wherever possible,

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but the pressure of the Old Guard and the sphinx-like silence of the Trotskyites, Lovestoneites and Stalinists, to say nothing of the other "Marxists", threw the issues openly on the table. There the pounding of the right and the "living death" of the left, after much juggling, sleight-of-hand and pussy-footing, enabled the rights to score one gain after the other on programmatic questions.

The Socialist Call announces that the convention-"accepted a CLARIFIED draft of the Declaration of Principles." Marxists have argued that many formulations of the draft needed recasting to the LEFT, but now that the Militant majority convention without a word from the "left" recasted the draft to the RIGHT, it is now "clarified"!

The clarified draft and the election program enables us to see clearly the reformist line adopted at Cleveland. On a number of important tactical questions such as trade union and unemployed work, they adopted a position of class collaboration. On the political arena they are working for the Farmer-Labor Party, for a whole series of reformist bills presented by liberal bourgeois candidates: they advocate the nationalization of industry, banks, etc., under capitalism and the amending of the US Constitution. The New York Times editorial of May 28 says, "In no other way could they peacefully and lawfully proceed to socialize and nationalize all production and business. But the process of amending is necessarily slow. The Socialists could not hope to elect a majority, not to say two thirds of both houses of Congress until after a long succession of electoral victories. Even then would follow the necessity of persuading three fourths of the states. All this leaves the outlook disappointing and dreary for those who go into this year's Presidential campaign under a banner emblazoned 'Socialism in our time'." The New York Times knows more about the Socialist Party and the Militant Program than the "left wingers" who have entered this party of "revolution".

On the question of war the convention improved upon the analysis of imperialism in the Detroit Declaration but made no change to the left in the reformist conclusions for action of the Detroit Declaration. In analysis- centrist; conclusions- reformist; consequently reformist as a whole. Moreover, even were this section better than it is, it would still not mark a step to the left in view of the decision of the convention condemning the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism in the face of which all "left resolutions are so much hypocritical cover for reformism.

The text of the election program does not speak of the need of overthrowing capitalism. To place this phrase in a resolution of the convention that is buried the day the conventions adjourns and to leave it out of the text of the election platform is to campaign on a reformist program.

The resolution on armed insurrection, introduced by the Cannon-Shachtman darling, Gus Tyler, is a decisive step to the right and formally closes the door to membership of all who advocate the Marxian position on this vital question.

But the resolution on armed insurrection contains a double dose of poison, or rather it is a double barrelled shotgun against the working class. Besides its reformist position on armed insurrection it says the following, "The Socialist Party, therefore, firmly believes in the strengthening and maintenance of existing democratic institutions through which the Socialist will of the masses may be cultivated and expressed."

The axis of this formulation is not revolutionary Marxism, which includes the fight for democratic rights, but is the axis of bourgeois democracy vs fascism -- it is the theoretical formula of a dozen brands of reformism including Stalinism. Any and every defender of bourgeois democracy against the PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION can agree fully with the formula on "strengthening and maintenance of democratic institutions" and "opposition to armed insurrection."

Again the editorial of the New York Times comes to the rescue of the Socialist Party. In the May 26th issue it says, "The Socialist Party has consistently disavowed plans or threats to overthrow the Government by force". The Zams, Goldmans, Cannons and Mustes are going to "reform" this "leftward" moving party.

The minority resolution against the Farmer-Labor Party which obtained 44 Old Guard votes and two others is hailed as a victory by the Cannon forces. It is no accident that the Old Guard could vote for this resolution. It is not a revolutionary Marxian position against the Farmer-Labor Party. Theoretically it is worse than the former position of the Workers Party. The line of the resolution, which the Old Guard hailed, is the counterposing of the Socialist Party to the Farmer-Labor Party, rather than counterposing a revolutionary party against the S.P., Farmer-Labor Party, or any other party. All non-revolutionary parties are agents of the bosses and seek to tie the workers to capitalism.

Many important issues were not even considered at the convention. For example, the Colonial question in its important principle theoretical aspects was ignored. Under the pressure of the Old Guard an ammendment was adopted giving the local autonomist state rights vs. centralization. This is not a step toward revolutionary consolidation, rather it is another step toward disintegration and bourgeois democracy.

Reformism Won at Cleveland.

Right Wingers who were not at the convention had more influence than leaders of the Militants on the convention floor. Maurer from Reading sent a letter to the convention attacking the Militants and called for the scrapping of the Detroit Declaration. The convention "clarified" the "disputed" issues, by adopting the proposals of the Old Guard. Of course the Old Guard, aggressive and constantly on the offensive, are not easily satisfied. They informed the convention it was not enough and are out to fight for their complete position. The New Leader of May 23rd had an editorial on the "Issues Confronting the Socialist Convention." They presented in this article a nine point program of their policy.

The two outstanding political points mentioned are, "against the theory and practice of the dictatorship", and "for democracy in theory and practice"; and, "we are against advocacy of violence

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and armed insurrection by party members inside and outside the party! On both of these major issues the Militants adopted the New Leader line presented to the convention.

Waldman and Hoan addressed the Amalgamated Convention while in Cleveland. Politically there was no difference between their line and the line of the convention. They both stressed the same political points. But when you compare the political line presented by Waldman and the political line of the election program on which Thomas is running, you will have to split hairs to find a difference.

Factions at the Convention.

The convention was graced with about a dozen groups and groupings. The outstanding factions were: the Old Guard, the Hoan-McLevy Municipal Socialists, the Thomas right-centrists, the Zam-Quitlow forces, the Lovestoneites, the Stalinists, and the three groupings of the Trotskyites - the Cannon-Muste-Goldman forces. The Hoan, Thomas, Hoopes bloc that was consummated behind the scene threw the convention into Hoan's lap.

The convention was dominated by a Reformist-Right-centrist bloc of Hoan and Thomas. The Hoan group held the balance of power and were decisive in shifting the programmatic base to the right, carrying with them the muddleheaded Militants.

Waldman for the Old Guard refused to yield an inch, took the offensive, denied a bloc with La Guardia and accused Hoan of a bloc with LaFollette. He denied friendship with Roosevelt and quoted the New Leader of April 19, 1933, where Thomas called the New Deal revolutionary, and gave "a tribute to the astute leadership of the President." The Old Guard controls the states of Conn., Mass., Mont., New Hampshire, Maryland, half of Pennsylvania, Vermont and Washington, with a powerful bloc in New York and other states.

Hoan was amply paid for his excellent work on program and for keeping the split down to the New York section, and at the same time gaining a political victory for the right wing which will enable regroupments to the right. Hoan obtained the Vice-President nomination for Nelson of Wisconsin. This representative of the farmers is to make up for the inability of the socialists to launch a Farmer-Labor Party this year.

The tail of the Militant caucus consists of the Trotskyites, the Lovestoneites, the Stalinists and other "Unity Groups". The Cannon-Muste-Goldman Trotskyite groups played a miserable role. They were completely passive and silent and did not raise their voice to present minority positions on important questions. The Trotskyites are rapidly sinking into this quagmire of reformism and opportunism.

But Thomas is well paid. If it were not for Trotsky's cable for entry and the Workers Party entry into the Socialist Party of the U.S. the Cleveland convention would have witnessed a split to the left on principle grounds instead of a shift to the right.

Let the Trotskyites say that they did not have a chance to present their position on the floor. Why not a statement to the convention by your faction? Why not a split when the convention adopted a REFORMIST position on the decisive question of the day?

The Cannon-Muste-Goldman Trotskyites have adopted the revisionist position on the following points since the New Turn of the ICL: They have presented a revisionist and new evaluation of Social-Democracy. They have a centrist position on Organic Unity. Throughout the world these groups have capitulated to the Socialist parties, and have liquidated the independent Marxian organization. They have a centrist position on war and on the Peoples Front.

The group in the United States has a false position on American Imperialism. They are silent on the Negro question. They are carrying on a tailendist policy to the Farmer-Labor Party and on several occasions have voted for it. They trail behind the Lewis Trade Union faction in the A.F. of L. They have a class collaboration unemployed position.

They exist peacefully side by side in the Socialist Party with Social Patriots. (Documentary evidence and detail proof will be furnished to all on these points for the asking. Time and again we have asked the Cannon forces to debate us publicly on these questions)

The false policy of the RPPA left it as a nonentity at the convention. Hensen said he would introduce the Militant Draft if no one else would, but the convention closed without a word on this "famous" document and he left the convention 2 days before it adjourned.

The Zams and the Goldmans joined the band wagon when Thomas was elected as their 1936 candidate. Goldman through Erber presented a minority election program. No one spoke for this program and although printed copies were on hand, none were presented to the delegates. It was just a faker's face-saver for Goldman.

The undercover Lovestoneite and Stalinist caucus played their usual miserable role. The editorial of the May 29 issue of the Daily Worker said, "The positive achievements of this convention are considerable. It overwhelmingly defeated the reactionary "Old Guard" group, who have tried to convert the Socialist Party into a tail of the New Deal kite and an agency for Hearst Red Baiting and anti-Soviet propaganda. The convention adopted a platform which, despite shortcomings and confusion on a number of questions, marks a forward step." A convention that makes a Right Step is called positive and forward by the Stalinists. This must be Earl Browder's editorial. This is understandable when the Stalinists can address a letter to the Socialist convention asking them to "explore" the possibilities of a joint Socialist-Communist presidential campaign, and in the same letter they say, "We are convinced that such consultation and the resulting agreement for joint struggle will result in strengthening of the Socialist Party as well as the Communist Party." (my emphasis H.O.)

The Militants were on the run politically from the moment the convention opened. The Militant confidential memorandum passed out only to the top clearly revealed in advance their sell-out and the reformist policy. On the decisive issues confronting the convention the memorandum in part said, "I do not believe that the suggested revisions would be seriously opposed by either side. They are decided IMPROVEMENTS over the existing Declaration of Principles from the OLD GUARD POINT OF VIEW in the following respects."

(My emphasis- Editor)

"1.-Reference to mass action is left out."

"2.-Reference to bogus democracy is left out."

"3.-The proposed revisions pledge the Socialists to try to get the Unions to use a general strike against the attempt at a Fascist coup and against a threat of declaration of war." This is, in the first place a false evaluation of the use of the general strike, sewing illusions as to how to stop war, and second, "if correct from the Socialist standpoint" it would be false to leave such a weapon in the hands of trade unions. The political organization and not the Trade Unions must take the lead in the struggle against fascism and war.

"4.-The advocacy of armed insurrection as a method of bringing about Socialism in the United States shall be declared contrary to the Principles of the Socialist party, and grounds for expulsion or suspension. There is no reason for making such a provision retroactive, however." This CLARIFIES Gus Tyler's ammendment on armed insurrection and leaves no doubt that the "lefts" who join the Socialist Party are capitulating to Reformism.

On the Communist-Socialist United Front activity the Militant memorandum says, "The Militant strategy, in other words, actually prevented any Stalinist from speaking at either parade or Polo Grounds demonstration, while the Old Guard strategy allowed a genuine (!) Communist, although not a Stalinite, to speak to their people."

The Cleveland Convention was a battle ground of three large factions The Old Guard, the Hoan-McLevy Municipal Socialists and the Thomas group. The other groups trailed along behind Thomas. The bloc of Thomas and Hoan was the decisive factor in enabling the convention to adopt the reformist program.

Only the Revolutionary Workers League, ^{carried} on independent activity. Only the Revolutionary Workers League in its own name presented a position of class struggle and revolutionary Marxism at the Cleveland convention.

"We desire a peaceful change brought about by constitutional means- In this country we want no dictatorship, we want no revolution. There are ample constitutional ways of bringing about the change in a peaceful and legal manner".

Norman Thomas-N.Y. Times 6/6/38.