

# Remembering That We Are Communists

By ISRAEL AMTER

THE development of the working class movement is a zigzag course. It is not merely a fight of the workers against the capitalists and the capitalist government. The lineup is not a clear one—here workers, there capitalists. During the course of the struggle, we have workers aligned against workers. Political movements also determine that, based on their economic interests, capitalists line up against capitalists.

In Germany, there is the party of the landowners, one of the industrialists and one of finance capital. In France, industrial capital fights against finance capital; in England, finance capital and landowners against industrial capital. In the United States, finance capital fights against industrial capital, altho the interlocking of directorates in banking institutions and industrial enterprises makes the cleavage less clear.

## Analysis of Various Lands.

The labor movement is even more confused. In Germany, the various labor federations adhere to different parties. In the big German Federation of Labor, the Communists and Social Democrats are fighting not only for control of the unions, but for their political orientation. The agricultural workers follow the lead of three parties, the Communist, Social Democratic and Catholic Party. Then there is the big stratum of the middle class, especially the lower middle class. These elements, according to their immediate economic situation, vacillate between the Communists, Social Democrats and some liberal party. This is typical of the petty bourgeoisie, whose interests and, consequently, their psychology change with the political wind.

In the United States, history will not be different; the development is tardier owing to the economic development of the country, and the composition of the political parties will somewhat differ from that of the European political parties. The big capitalist parties, up to a short time ago, had the support of the capitalists, petty bourgeoisie, farmers and workers. Democratic illusions are powerful in America, owing to the cast that starting life "on a shoe-string" was possible here. But as these possibilities have disappeared, owing to the concentration of capital, and existences are being more definitely stratified. The workers passed thru a levelling process during the war; many small tradesmen have been proletarianized; farmers have been proletarianized, as witness the increase in farm tenancy and the flight of millions of farmers from the land; capital has been concentrated.

## Farmers Becoming Class Conscious.

The proletarianization of the farmers and of a section of the petty bourgeoisie—professionals, teachers and small tradesmen—is one of the most remarkable phenomena in American history. The workers, on the other hand, in part, despite becoming real proletarians and no longer belonging to the "aristocracy" of labor, retain their old psychology. It is not astonishing, therefore, that the main movement for a realignment of political forces in the United States emanates from the farmers. Crushed by finance capital, robbed by the railroads, elevators and speculators; forced to sell at starvation prices and to buy industrial products at highly inflated prices; they are rebelling and their rebellion is taking on a political aspect.

The farmers are, as yet, politically conscious only in part. Among many of them, it is merely a repetition of the People's Party movement—against the land-sharks, banks and railroads. The class-

conscious farmer part knows clearly what it wants and has learned from the history of the past movements, and particularly of the Nonpartisan League, that it can only get what it wants from a class party. They have also learned that a farmer movement alone will result in failure—it will be crushed as the Nonpartisan League was crushed. The history of Bulgaria demonstrates the same facts in Europe. Hence these farmers have united with revolutionary and radical workers in the formation of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party and the many State farmer-labor parties.

The other section of the farmers, less class-conscious, but demanding that a change in political affairs be brought about, still believes in "good," "honest" leaders. When such leaders appear, who have no intention of adhering to a class party, as La Follette, Shipstead and Johnson, these farmers follow in their trail, in the futile belief that these St. Georges will be able to kill the dragons of the old big capitalist parties. Their immediate economic interests may not be so closely bound up with those of the workers—or when they actually are, they still cherish the belief that all Americans are "free citizens" and are alike at the polls; and especially that the American electors control the government.

The workers are held back by many influences. Suffering from the same illusions as the farmers and petty bourgeoisie, they are imprisoned by leaders who, because of associations, lean in two directions. Gompers, as a member of the National Civic Federation, is merely an appendage of the capitalist class and is trying again to chain the workers to the wheels of the capitalist political chariot. Johnson, Keating, Fitzpatrick, et al., whose attachments are not so strong—altho once they were exponents of a separate farmer-labor party—are ready to barter. Today they have strong leanings to the "good" candidates of a big capitalist party. But the revolutionary and progressive workers, who have seen thru the sham of the game and have learned at least part of the lessons that were pounded into their heads in the past few years, but especially since 1922, demand the formation of a class party, together with the working farmers.

## Dangers of Third Party Movement.

The question before us in this article is not whether the result of the conflict of interest at the St. Paul convention will be a class farmer-labor party or a third party. The problem is: What is to be our attitude toward either one of these parties? What is to be our action as Communists?

Our action must always be Communist action. We must never forget that we belong to a Communist Party, with a Communist program. Not alone are we bound by the discipline of a Communist Party, but we have to propound the principles of a Communist Party. How then shall we be able to stand for both the Workers Party and the National Farmer-Labor Party or a third party program?

Two dangers confront us: In the propaganda in the shops and union meetings, at public meetings and on the street corners, we may either entirely forget the fact that we are Communists and promote the program and platform of the reform party alone; or we may remember we are Communists so strongly that we bitterly attack the reform party platform.

Both methods are wrong—altho there is far greater danger that we shall forget our own definite aims—the aims of the Workers Party—and identify ourselves completely with the reformistic policy. In our zeal to secure the co-operation of progressive trade union leaders, in the needle trades and elsewhere, there was danger at one time of our iden-

tifying ourselves completely with their plans and not disclosing the fact that we are Communists. In our great, wholesome desire to build up a great class farmer-labor party, we may easily put our soul into the movement, make its program our own and gradually swing over to reformism. This is not likely to be true of the Workers Party, which is made up of healthy proletarian elements—but it is true of single members and of large numbers of them. Owing to the difficulty of defending a new party against the big capitalist parties and of presenting our criticism of its aims and methods; and in view of our wish to demonstrate to the workers and farmers that we are earnestly endeavoring to build up the new party, some members may very easily steer into reformist channels and actually get lost to the Communist movement.

## Concrete Examples of Degeneration.

This is not only theoretically possible but has actually taken place in two drastic instances in recent history. The Communist Party of Germany sent three of the best members of its Central Executive Committee into the Socialist-Communist government of Saxony. It seemed as if this government might be the starting point of the Proletarian Revolution in Germany. But these three right wing Communists completely demoralized the Communist forces of Germany. Whether the German workers were ready to fight or not, the spectacle of these three Communists carrying on propaganda and acting in such fashion that they were not to be differentiated from the left social-democrats confused the revolutionary masses, who were waiting for action. These supposedly tried Communists were really corrupted by contact with the reformists and forgot their Communist program and aims.

In Great Britain, again during the recent elections, several Communist candidates on the Labor Party ticket even refused to state that they were Communists. Their election addresses played up all the reformistic illusions that still fill the minds of the working masses. Imbued with the false idea that it is their prime duty to build up the Labor Party against the capitalist parties, and not that they must defend it and still mercilessly criticize it for the weaknesses of its program and the falsity of its methods, they adulterated the Communist propaganda. Thereby they made the whole Communist Party responsible for propaganda and acts that a Communist Party must repudiate if it does not wish to be completely discredited.

## Our Duty.

Let no one think that the task is simple: To defend a party and criticize it! It is extremely difficult especially for membership that is not trained in such maneuvering. The struggle throws us into this action and the membership must be prepared for it. If the members do not retain their physiognomy, if the Workers Party does not retain its identity, both in propaganda and action as a Communist Party, it will be lost in the struggle and disintegrate.

There is the other danger that the party may forget its duty to defend and build up the new party as the only means whereby the masses of workers and working farmers will be separated from the big capitalist parties. It is an illusion to hope that the masses of the workers and working farmers will, at the present stage of the struggle in the United States, turn to the Workers Party as their political leader. But to stand aside from the struggle and from participation in the party, even a third party—under certain given conditions—means to isolate ourselves, to be totally discredited as leaders of the revolutionary working class. It

means to howl into the desert with our propaganda and to find no heeding ears.

Unexperienced comrades, however, may easily turn to the other pole and attack the reformist party so vehemently, that our sincerity in supporting it may easily be questioned. We must not repeat the errors of two and three years ago, when we were inexperienced in trade union work and struck out equally hard with both fists at all trade union leaders, regardless of the fact of whether they were willing to co-operate with us or were our outspoken enemies. Our enmity went so far that comrades were ready even to attack a Communist who had been elected a trade union official, simply because he had become an official. These were powerful remnants of left Communism from which the American Communists were suffering very seriously.

## Danger of Left-Communist Action.

There is the further danger that Communists who recognize the proletarian struggle will not be fought out in the United States congress but by entirely different methods, may not earnestly enter the election fight with proper enthusiasm. Even as Communists we must utilize even the United States congress to carry on our battle. A Liebknecht, a Cachin—the Communists in the German, Bulgarian and Italian parliaments—have been able to rally big hosts of workers and peasants to the banner of the Communist Party. They have utilized parliament as the platform to tell—not so much the capitalists—but the workers and peasants the truth of the economic and political situation. It is the foremost tribunal that the bourgeoisie furnishes us—for the revolution. Hence we must uproot this residue of Left Communism—remembering that we are Communists.

Furthermore, the workers and farmers of the United States still believe that the United States congress will be able to help them. They must have their own party. They must elect their own men. They must themselves experience the fact that the capitalists of America will slam the doors of congress in their faces and institute a fascist dictatorship before they will hand over any power to the workers and farmers. The workers of New York and Ohio should have learned this lesson in part; but they still believe that "democracy" exists in the United States and that these two instances are faux pas. We must fight along with them, all the time pointing out the futility of this method of struggle, and by word and act showing them the right way. This is remembering that we are Communists.

## Remember! We Are Communists.

There is, however, less danger of our being too Left than of being too Right. Having come out of the Left sickness, practice shows that parties swing over to the Right, owing to their lack of experience in real Communist tactics.

The Central Executive Committee and the membership must beware of these dangers. Should the deadline be crossed, enormous damage can be done. The Workers Party can be demoralized, the revolutionary workers who are now turning to us will be disgusted; the Communists, who are acting as the real ferment within the whole labor and farmer movement, will have lost their stamina and the whole movement will be set back years.

Despite these dangers, the Workers Party must enter the struggle and prove its mettle. To stand still is to forget our task. To act merely as a propaganda organization is to betray the workers and farmers who want action. This will condemn us to complete isolation—while the movement will stumble on.

Hence into the fight, all the time remembering that we are Communists!