

Marx and Labor Parties

By J. A. McDONALD

WHEN the Socialist Party of America decided to join the Lafollette parade they tried to justify their attitude by quoting Marx. The official organ of the Party—"The New Leader"—found in the Communist Manifesto the material considered essential for this purpose. Under the heading "Proletarians and Communists" Marx and Engels stated that "The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties. They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole."

What could be clearer than this? reasoned the S. P. as to the position of Marx on the matter? He advises us to be a section of a working-class party and, in the Lafollette movement, have we not just such a party as Marx describes? As this mode of reasoning has been adopted by the Socialist Party of Canada as well since the recent compromise with the Canadian Labor Party it is surely worth while to investigate the respective claims.

The Communist Manifesto was written in the year 1847. It was, to begin with, the theoretical and practical programme of a small secret organization known as "The Communist League." This Party was composed of a handful of refugees, or exiles, from different countries, who met in London, and decided to play a conspicuous part in shaping the working-class movement of that time.

The League had its inception in a revolutionary atmosphere. Great social changes were presaged prior to the stormy, war-mad year of 1848. As Labriola states, "The League everywhere carried an odor of revolution, both because the thing was in the air and because its instinct and method of procedure tended that way; and as long as the revolution was bursting forth effectively, it provided itself, thanks to the new doctrine of the Manifesto, with an instrument of orientation which was at the same time a weapon for combat."

The social perspective of that period was vastly different from what it is today. There was no possibility of an organized Communist Party entering the political field in opposition to the capitalist system and class. They had to make use of the material at hand. The only possible means of procedure lay in becoming the vanguard of the workers parties in all countries and so explaining "the line of march, the conditions and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement."

To understand what Marx meant by the term—working-class party—we can see his description in the same section of the Manifesto—"The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all the other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat." Could the New Leader or the Western Clarion associate the parties led by Lafollette and MacDonald with such a program?

A short time later in his address to the Central Authority of the League in 1850 Marx after paying his respects to the bourgeois democrats who were led by the Lafollettes and MacDonalds of that day says, "The democratic demands can never satisfy the party of the proletariat. While the democratic petty bourgeoisie would like to bring the revolution to a close as soon as their demands are more or less complied with, it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent, to keep it going until all the ruling and possessing classes are deprived of powers, the governmental machinery occupied by the proletariat, and the organization of the working classes of all lands is so far advanced that all rivalry and competition among themselves has ceased; until the important forces of production are concentrated in the hands of the proletarians. With us it is not a matter of reforming private property but of abolishing it; not of hushing up the class an-

tagonism, but of abolishing the classes, not of ameliorating the existing society, but of establishing a new one."

Surely these quotations from the pen of Marx himself will suffice to make clear what he had in mind when he spoke of the Communists not being opposed to other working class parties, and having no interests apart from those of the proletariat as a whole. But what would Marx do in the midst of present conditions?

In the first preface to the Manifesto written by the two authors in 1872, and again in the fourth preface by Engels alone in 1888 we are told that the programme had become antiquated in some of its details despite the fact that the general principles are as correct today as ever. The details referred to include the revolutionary demands, the criticism of literature, and the remarks on the then existing political parties. These had all changed to such an extent that any reference to them now would have to be worded altogether different.

But making use of the lessons so well driven home by Marx and Engels in the Manifesto and elsewhere what must be our attitude in respect to the political parties of today? I scarcely consider it essential to review the make-up of the Independent-Progressive conglomeration led by Lafollette, as I am of the opinion that even the Socialist renegades of the S. P. of C. would not contend that this a party of the working class.

But, on the question of the British Labor Party we have abundant evidence scattered through the pages of the Clarion to the effect that our erst-while comrades consider it a clear expression of independent working class aims and interests.

Just how such a conclusion can be arrived at I am at a loss to know. One would, indeed, require an imagination as fertile as the valley of the Nile in order to picture the British Labor Party as an independent working class force in British politics which views the interests of the masses to be separate from, and opposite to those of the ruling class; and that sees in its representation in the House of Commons the means of changing "Capitalist property in the means of wealth production into socially controlled economic forces."

Ever since its inception the Labor Party has proved itself to be a prop of capitalism. Even in the period of opposition its leaders were always ready to align themselves with the bourgeoisie for the purpose of lowering the age of children leaving school so that the mills and factories could secure ample cheap labor to maintain capitalist supremacy.

Again when the Plimsol mark had to be raised on British ships so as to carry heavier cargoes and, consequently, endanger the lives of sailors, the labor leaders were at the beck and call of their masters to make good the change. When government troops were called out to quell disturbances in different departments of industry the same leaders were found voting against their own amendment censuring the government for its action.

If the attitude of the party in opposition is not sufficient to demonstrate the interests they represent then the attitude in office is even plainer still. Imagine a workers' government voting thirteen millions of dollars to increase his Majesty's air forces, and laying down five new cruisers and two destroyers for the purpose of enabling British workers to massacre the workers of other lands in order to preserve British Imperialism.

But, we are told, the support of the Labor Party comes from the workers of Britain. Granted. So does the great majority of the seven millions of votes received by the Baldwin Government, and the four millions recorded on behalf of Liberalism come from the ranks of the working class. In their ignorance of their class position the workers flock to every standard but their own. This ignorance must

be dispersed in Britain, Canada, and elsewhere before any drastic change can be effected in Social affairs.

This is precisely our function as Marxians and revolutionists. We must maintain and extend an educational programme that will assist to brush the cobwebs from the brain of labor, and make possible the day when the capitalist system of society is replaced by a social form in harmony with the needs of the world's workers. To accomplish this we require a revolutionary programme and a revolutionary party. Nothing less.

AVAST YE CRITICS.

OF course I mean "C.'s" critics. Your efforts are hopeless; you will never out-write "C." It can't be done; he is invincible in that respect. In spite of hell and high water "C" will have the last word. He reminds me of the story about the Irish cook who was having a row with her mistress. Says the lady: "Nora, you always insist on having the last word." Says Nora: "Sure and how the devil do I know when you are going to stop?" It is a cinch that if the critics don't stop the argument will go on forever, or at least until the disputants have left this vale of tears and woe.

"C" tells us that he stands "all, all alone," and I might add like "brave Horatious."

"But constant still in mind:

Thrice thirty thousand foes before,

And the broad flood behind."

And even Horatious eventually took to the water, but I don't think there is one chance in a million that "C" will ever do so. Consequently I would suggest that his critics stop fighting with him and write on other subjects that are more instructive, and let "C" "have at it" his own way.

This will, no doubt, furnish "C" with a text for about three pages in the "Clarion," dealing with my shortcomings, fallacies, and mistakes, but I know they exist anyhow, so it does not matter and, furthermore, I don't mind being a martyr in a just and holy cause like this.

F. J. McNEY.

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