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# The Death of the Socialist Party.

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Published in *The Liberator*, v. 7, no. 10, whole no. 78 (October 1924), pp. 11-14.

This year, 1924, will be notable in American political history. It will record the rise and the fall of political parties. There is no doubt that there will be a realignment of forces under the banners of the two old parties, Republican and Democratic. The Democratic Party is being ground into dust in this year's presidential struggle. Wall Street, more than ever, supports the Republican Party as its own. Middle class elements, with their bourgeois following in the labor movement, again fondly aspire to a third party, a so-called liberal or progressive party, under the leadership of Senator LaFollette. This is all in the capitalist camp.

For the first time, this year, the Communists are in the national political arena, with a presidential ticket, that is being put on the ballot in many states by the Workers Party. The Communists furnish the only opposition to the capitalist candidates.

There remains the Socialist Party. As an organization it has already ceased to exist except in name. It remains but as a bugaboo with which the *Wall Street Journal* seeks to frighten some of its readers. It lives as a memory, although Victor L. Berger is still running for Congress on the Socialist ticket in Wisconsin. With the picture of LaFollette besides his own on posters that stare at you from the billboards in the Wisconsin metropolis, Berger proclaims, "We are the true progressives."

## History Repeats Itself.

It was in 1912. Theodore Roosevelt was a flaming comet shooting across the political skies. Everyone was trying to adjust himself to this phenomenon in the presidential campaign of that year. This was especially true of the Socialists.

It was at that time that I had a talk with Berger, enjoying his first term as the lone Socialist Congressman. He pushed the Roosevelt wave gently aside, as if it were unworthy of attention.

"In order to live, a political party must have an economic basis," he said. "The Roosevelt Progressive Party has no economic basis. It cannot live." That settled Roosevelt in Berger's usual brusque style.

It is the same Berger who this year follows unhesitatingly the LaFollette candidacy, the "Roosevelt wave" of 1924. To be sure, the officialdom of organized labor is a little more solid in support of LaFollette in 1924 than it was in crawling aboard the Bull Moose bandwagon in 1912. But this is more than offset by the fact that Roosevelt had a real party; LaFollette has none, wants none. The LaFollette campaign has no stable economic basis. The labor backing of the Wisconsin Senator does not profess to fight for the workers' class interests. They do not recognize the class struggle. LaFollette's little bourgeois following has interests but it won't fight for them. This is the same middle class that brought the Populist Party into existence, soon allowing it to fuse with the Democratic Party. It followed William Jennings Bryan for a time. In 1912 it acclaimed Roosevelt, "the trust buster," and this year it rallies to LaFollette, weak in purpose, aimless in its wanderings. The chief asset of the LaFollette campaign is the Wisconsin Senator's personality. In 1912 it was a Bull Moose. This year it is a Bobcat.

The year of 1912 was one of discontent with the two old parties. Roosevelt polled heavily. Debs got nearly a million votes. This was all negative — against something.

Most of the strength that is going to LaFollette this year results from the fact that the workers are demanding something. They are for something — power

for themselves, for their class. Labor has been temporarily frightened out of the demand for Soviet Rule, as in Russia. Instead it has developed an appetite for a Labor Party government, as in England. Thus LaFollette, decking himself out like a MacDonald, although he is opposed to a Labor Party of any kind, lures the illusioned workers into his fold. And Wheeler, the Vice Presidential candidate, with the usual political chicanery, proclaims himself in favor of a "Labor Party," baptized "liberal" or "progressive." And the workers have swallowed the bait.

That there is a powerful undercurrent, seething through the ranks of labor, seeking something positive, is uncovered in straw ballots taken at factories, mines or mills, anywhere. The LaFollette politicians are trying to capitalize it. This was seen very clearly in the statement of Wheeler, the Vice Presidential candidate, that he favored a MacDonald Labor Party. But his own words betrayed the fact that he knew very little about the British Labour Party.

It is on this political quicksand that LaFollette, with his middle class followers; and Berger, with his few squads of Socialists, are trying to pass over into the promised land, where they hope peacefully to achieve political power. But the quicksands do not give up their victims. LaFollette and Berger will not make good on these expectations from them. Little bankers, landlords, and corner store businessmen, with their professional political allies, cannot spawn a "Labor Party."

### **Socialists Feared Roosevelt.**

In 1912, I was touring through Kansas and ran into George E. Brewer, then prominently connected with Fred D. Warren's weekly, *The Appeal to Reason*, but now associated with the *Minnesota Star* and running for Congress in that state on the Magnus Johnson ticket, which is backing LaFollette. In 1912 Brewer was terror-stricken, believing that Roosevelt had swallowed the whole Socialist platform. Which, of course, wasn't true. But Brewer later left the Socialist Party and joined the Non-Partisan League. This year the Socialists did not wait to be swallowed by the LaFollette movement. They plunged right into it of their own accord. Noah was not more successfully absorbed by the Biblical whale. But the difference is that political

parties, once swallowed, are not cast up again. They go down forever. They go down to stay.

The Socialist Party, therefore, treads today the double path to extinction. It is dissolving into the LaFollette movement, which, in its turn, faces dissolution after the excitement of the election campaign is over, because, in Berger's own words, "it has no economic foundation."

To show that the first process is going on at an accelerated pace, it is merely necessary to quote from a recent hysterical appeal emanating from the National Office of the Socialist Party in Chicago. It says:

Comrades, you will be a sick and sorry lot, following the election, if you neglect your own sacred organization, the Socialist Party. Just here is the impending danger.

"A Connecticut comrade writes us thus: 'Our party members are joining the LaFollette clubs and neglecting the Socialist Party meetings.'

That development is inevitable. When the Socialist Party deserted the "Labor Party" fight, turned its back on class action, and joined the LaFollette straddle of the two old parties of Wall Street, its members had two choices. They could either join the Communist forces in the Workers Party, or go over into the LaFollette camp. Many did join the Communist ranks, singly and in groups. The rest are going over to the temporary LaFollette organizations that will collapse after the election day has passed.

There is the end of the Socialist Party that has led a varied existence during almost a quarter of a century. Morris Hillquit, Victor L. Berger, and Eugene V. Debs, in 1900 and 1901, organized the present Socialist Party out of their factions in the Social Democratic Party and the Socialist Labor Party. The same leaders are now in attendance at the burial of the organization they created.

During the days of its pioneering, the Socialist Party grew. Although it possessed vigorous, revolutionary elements from the beginning, the Socialist Party, as an organization, never escaped the Hillquit-Berger grip, and it always remained thoroughly saturated with bourgeois respectability. Yet it gathered strength from discontented elements so that the membership of 1903, numbering 15,975, the first on record, had increased to 118,045 in 1912.

The first taste of success, in 1910, had gone to

the heads of the opportunistic Socialist Party leadership. Emil Seidel had been elected the Socialist Mayor of Milwaukee in the spring of 1910. In the fall of the same year, Berger went to Congress for the first time. During the next few months hundreds of Socialists were elected to city, county, and state offices. The appetite for political careers, for a "place in the sun," was plainly visible at the most representative gathering of American Socialists ever held, the 1912 National Presidential Convention at Indianapolis. This gathering witnessed the savage struggle over the now famous anti-sabotage clause, Section 6. Berger threatened to split the party. But he didn't. Instead, he had his way and the party constitution was changed. That was the last Socialist convention to witness the presence of William D. Haywood.

There followed a period of growing desertions of the party's ranks. Revolutionaries left by the thousands. Most of these drifted into the Industrial Workers of the World, infusing that organization with a new vitality. The story of the decline of the Socialist Party in these years is shown by the membership figures: 1912 — 118,045; 1913 — 95,057; 1914 — 93,579; 1915 — 79,374; 1916 — 83,284; 1917 — 80,379.

The Socialist Party was born thoroughly saturated with the opportunistic ideology of the Second (Socialist) International. The greatest victory scored by this opportunism was won over the revolutionaries in the party in 1912. Without the large parliamentary bloc of the European parties, with a diminishing number of elected officials in office, the opening of the war found the party in a state best expressed by J. Stitt Wilson, former Socialist Mayor of Berkeley, California, then a member of the party's National Executive Committee, but now also in the LaFollette camp.

"We must do something to galvanize the party into life," confessed Wilson, in the early days of the war. "We must do something."

This hoped-for "something" did not materialize until the United States got into the war and the revolutionaries won at least the spiritual control of the party at the Special Anti-War National Convention held in St. Louis in April, 1917. It was there that the St. Louis Anti-War Proclamation was adopted that gave the party, with the added impetus of the developing Russian Revolution, a new lease of life. See the membership figures climb: 1917 — 80,379; 1918 — 82,344;

1919 (first three months) — 104,822.

But the revolutionaries won only a spiritual victory at St. Louis. Hillquit and Berger still controlled the organization. They held power in the National Executive Committee. They steered the party through the war as they saw fit, against the spirit of the St. Louis Proclamation.

Hillquit, Berger, and Stedman presented to the forces of capitalism "a law abiding party" at the Albany trial of the Socialist Assemblymen. They winked at the social-patriotism of the New York Socialist Aldermen, notably the Socialist vote in favor of capitalism's "Arch of Victory," inscribing "Murmansk," an alleged triumph of American arms in Soviet Russia, on its columns. Through its spokesmen this Hillquit-Berger-controlled Socialist Party repeatedly attacked the Soviet rule of the Russian workers and peasants.

This was the poison gas atmosphere that combated the attempt of the party membership to win organizational power in the referendum elections of 1919. The overwhelming victory of the rank and file was forestalled by the Hillquits and Bergers through the expulsion of more than half the party.

Then followed the split, resulting in the Communist elements withdrawing from the party, only on a much larger scale than the exodus in 1912. From his prison cell at Atlanta, even Debs joined with Hillquit and Berger in their attacks on the Communists, who were fighting for the creation of a centralized, disciplined, revolutionary, working class organization in this country, in harmony with the aims of the Russian Revolution and under the guidance of the Communist International. The small numbers among the party membership who really stood with Berger and Hillquit are again shown in the membership figures: 1919 (first three months) — 104,822 (before the split); 34,926 (after the split); 1920 — 26,766; 1921 (first seven months) — 14,934; May 1921 — 9,919; July 1921 — 5,781. No membership figures have been issued by the Socialist Party lately.

In 1921, at the Detroit National Convention of the Socialist Party, Hillquit assured his few remaining followers that "the Communist wave is receding." That was taken up as the cry of salvation by the whole Socialist press, especially by Abe Cahan's *Jewish Daily Forward* in New York City. But others thought that

this prophecy was not sufficient. Daniel W. Hoan, the Socialist Mayor of Milwaukee, came forward at Detroit with the fusion plan that was again to put the Socialist Party on its feet.

In discussing the action of the Detroit Convention, in adopting Hoan's proposition, I wrote in September 1921, "Complete fusion is inevitable, and this means the end of the Socialist Party."

Note the steps taken under the Hoan plan. First, an effort was made to call delegates of labor unions together under Socialist auspices. That the Socialists had no foothold in the unions was shown by the fact that so few responded that this proposed conference was never held. Then the Socialists, under Hillquit's leadership, adopted their servile, Communist-baiting role in the Conference for Progressive Political Action. They fought against the "labor party" idea. They urged that Communist delegates be not admitted at the Cleveland conference. When Hillquit's delegates were thrown out of the Albany Conference for Progressive Action in 1923 by the Tammany Hall politicians, the Socialists trimmed their sails a little more so they would be again acceptable.

Berger refused to run a candidate against LaFollette in 1922 in Wisconsin. In this year's state convention every delegate with the exception of Berger fought this policy, even Mayor Hoan.

"When we don't run a candidate against LaFollette, the workers ask, 'What is the difference then, between the Socialists and LaFollette?' declared the delegates."

But the Wisconsin Socialist delegation went to the national Socialist convention, at Cleveland in July [1924], and voted for fusion with the LaFollette campaign. Today LaFollette owns what there is of the Socialist Party. In California LaFollette is now running on the Socialist ticket.

If there is anything the Socialists have not done to turn over the last atom of strength they possess to the candidates of the millionaires, Vanderlip, Spreckels, and Rawleigh, they should be notified, since they desire to leave nothing undone in this direction.

There was a note of pathos in the voice of Walter Thomas Mills, the once magnetic author of *The Struggle for Existence*, as he sold LaFollette campaign buttons to a Socialist picnic at Riverview Park in Chicago in September. His plea for dollars for LaFollette

buttons fell on almost deaf ears. His voice sounded like the benediction over something dead. Dollars for the Republican politician, LaFollette, while a press service was sending out pictures in anticipation of the death of Eugene V. Debs, again in the Lindlahr Sanitarium.

The election isn't over. But it can already be said that no votes will be cast for a Socialist candidate for President. Because there is no Socialist Presidential ticket for the first time since the Socialist Party was organized. When the Socialist Party deserted the class struggle on the side of the working class and joined the class enemy of labor, it lost all basis for its existence — its economic basis, as Berger puts it. It has done more than quit labor's class fight. It has joined capitalism's fight against labor. It has become a counterrevolutionary force.

LaFollette will not make much headway with his middle class, third party fight. The American middle class hasn't the will to fight to protect its interests. In Great Britain there is a Liberal Party. Other countries have their parties in which there is a place for the small bourgeoisie. But in the United States the little capitalists, as has already been shown, have never been able to put up a struggle of any proportions. This year they are rallying in pursuit of another will-o-the-wisp — this time the temporary popularity of Senator LaFollette.

When the Bolshevik Revolution swept Russia in November 1917, resulting in the rearing of the Russian Soviet Republic on an unshakable foundation, the American Socialist leadership — under the thumb of the Hillquit-Berger machine — were at first bewildered. Then they began to fight it.

"Anarchists!" exclaimed Adolph Germer, then Secretary of the Socialist Party, as he urged me to "go slow" in greeting the Russian triumph. I was editing the official party publication.

"It can't last a week!" exclaimed Morris Hillquit.

"Lenin is a good man," admitted Victor Berger. "I met him once. But he is wrong. Lenin doesn't agree with me."

These frightened Socialists carried their anti-Communist fight first to the party's membership and then to the workers generally.

First, it was in the Conference for Progressive Political Action, at its meetings held both in Chicago

[Feb. 1922] and at Cleveland [Dec. 1922], that the Socialists raised the cry, with much fury, that the Communists were apostles of destruction, preachers of "force and violence." Not only were anathemas hurled at the Russian Communists, but American Communists were sought out as immediate victims.

"Rid the party of the Communists and the party will grow," said Berger. "Don't admit their representatives to the Conference for Progressive Political Action."

"Insist that every party member must be an American citizen," declared Abe Cahan, editor of the New York *Jewish Daily Forward*, published in the heart of New York's East Side. Of course, Cahan had forgotten that he was ever an immigrant himself.

And after the Communists, every last one of them, had quit the Socialist Party, Hillquit declares, "Now we will get members, not by the thousands, but by the hundreds of thousands."

These Socialists rushed around to John Fitzpatrick, Edward N. Nockels, Robert Buck, and other officials of Chicago labor in 1923, and at the July 4th Conference of that year tried to instill their anti-Communist fear into them.

Then these Socialists raised the cry against the Communists, incidental to the June 17th national Farmer-Labor Party Conference in St. Paul, this year. One of their ablest spokesmen was on the ground, Walter Thomas Mills.

And in the labor unions the Socialists linked up with the most reactionary labor officials in the Gompers camp to make war on the Communists. And this year they are all at the footstool of Senator LaFollette, one of the ablest capitalist politicians this nation has ever seen, pretty much on a par with Lloyd George in

Great Britain.

The Socialist movement has been swallowed up in the LaFollette wave. It has been completely obliterated.

It did some little damage to the American revolutionary struggle. But not much. Palmer's "red raids" against the Communists in January 1920 could not have been successfully carried out except with the aid of Socialist slanders and malicious lies. And instance of this was the attack of Seymour Stedman, Socialist lawyer, on the Communists in the courts in Detroit, Michigan, where Palmer hit hardest. It no doubt discouraged many workers temporarily. But these will take courage again, as many are doing, and join hands with the organized Communists.

In Europe the powerful, counterrevolutionary Social Democratic parties have been the best servants of capitalism. In Hungary the yellow Socialists helped overthrow the Soviet Republic. In Germany and elsewhere they have prevented the ascendancy of Soviet Rule to power. Tens of thousands of Communists have been slain, and other hundreds of thousands sent to prison in the attack of the forces of the capitalist white terror, with its Socialist allies, throughout Western Europe.

In the United States it was not given to the social democracy of Berger, Hillquit, and Debs to develop this strength to do harm. Every attack on the Communists from the Socialist camp has resulted in new desertions. First, the party membership left en masse. Now the workers who can be fooled vote LaFollette instead of Socialist. Nothing is left of the Socialist movement but the memories of yesterday. To the growing Communist movement belongs the future.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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