

*from*  
COMMUNISM

*to*  
SOCIALISM

*by*  
Albert Goldman

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A LECTURE DELIVERED BEFORE THE  
6th CONGRESSIONAL BRANCH FORUM  
OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF COOK COUNTY  
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Ever since the split in the Socialist movement beginning in 1919 and the formation of two bitterly hostile camps of Communism and Socialism, there have been instances of members of one party going over to the side of the other party. On far more numerous occasions did adherents of Socialism go over to the camp of Communism, than vice versa. Certainly, under the regime of Lenin and even since Stalin took over the leadership of the Third International, not a year passed but that some group of Socialists in some country or other, left the Socialist party and joined the Communist party. Here and there, on rare occasions, during the period when Lenin lived and more frequently after his death, Communists, for one reason or another, went to the right and joined a party of the Second International. In the last five or six years there might have been some cases where members of Communist parties joined Socialist parties not because they became convinced that the principles of Communism were wrong, but because of their disgust with the tactics of the Communist International and with the factional squabbles within the Communist parties. Not wanting to remain on the side lines or to join a small group, some Communists might have joined the Socialist parties. But one can say definitely that there never was an instance when a substantial number of ex-members of a Communist party claiming not to have renounced the principles of revolutionary Marxism, joined a Socialist party for the primary reason that a revolutionary Marxist could not function within the Communist party.

Not until the group of "Trotskyites" in France joined the Socialist party of France did such a phenomenon occur. And now in the United States, about fifty ex-members of the Communist party either have joined or have decided to join the Socialist party because they became convinced that the Communist party cannot serve as the instrument for the emancipation of the working class, and the revolutionary Marxists can feel more at home in the Socialist than in the Communist party. The importance of such an event is attested to by the comment it aroused not only in the press of the different revolutionary groups but even in the capitalist press. What is the explanation of such an incident? What events led up to it and what significance has it for the future development of the revolutionary movement?

Needless to say, the Communist party and the different Communist groups deny that those who joined the Socialist party are revolutionary Marxists. The adverse criticism and scornful attacks levelled at them by the official party as well as by the "Lovestoncoites", "Trotskyites" and other smaller groups had one refrain, that Gitlow, Zam, Goldman and all others who became members of the S. P. capitulated to the Social-Democracy (by which is meant reformism) and that the mere fact of their joining the S. P. shows that they are not revolutionary Marxists but reformists. Most laughable of all is the case of Cannon, one of the "Trotskyite" leaders calling me a "strike breaker" and the others "renegades". All other groups in the Communist movement take the consistent position that anyone who, under any and all circumstances, leaves a Communist group and joins the Socialists is a renegade. It is impossible for a "Trotskyite" to take such a position in view of the action of the Trotsky group in France in joining the Socialist party of that country. All that anyone belonging to the Trotsky group can possibly say, is that in the country to join the S. P. is an incorrect tactic. Cannon's outburst can be explained on one or all of the following hypotheses: 1) his anxiety to defend himself from the attack of some members of his group who claim that he is secretly in favor of the idea of joining the Socialist party; 2) to convince himself and to try to convince others that he is the Lenin of America by trying to imitate the latter who call

Zinoviev and Kamenev "strike-breakers" when they resigned from the central committee of the Bolshevik party because they disagreed with the decision to overthrow the Kerensky government; 3) that he was sober and could not think straight.

It is not altogether safe to accept the testimony of the enemy as to the revolutionary character of any group. The enemy at times is so confoundedly and unnecessarily scared, that it exaggerates the revolutionary nature and especially the revolutionary effectiveness of a self proclaimed revolutionary group. Witness the fear of the Communist party on the part of some capitalist representatives. Whereas everyone in the least acquainted with the work of that party knows how ineffective that party really is. Nevertheless, the judgment of an intelligent enemy is of considerable value.

The reactionary right wing of the Socialist party is bitterly opposed to the admission of the group of ex-members of the Communist party into the S. P. The right wingers considered them Communists and are not at all persuaded by the attacks of the official Communists and the small Communist Opposition groups. There was no doubt in the minds of those who composed the S. P. old guard that Gitlow and the others were revolutionists and not reformists. And the old guard knows if anyone does.

Here it is necessary to state that we no longer designate ourselves as Communists. That term must be left to the Stalinites and those who are very close to them in ideology and tactics. Lenin adopted the term "Communist" to distinguish the revolutionary Marxist from the reformists. At this time when the Communist parties are closer to being religious sects than revolutionary Marxist parties and when revolutionary Marxism is appearing and coming to the fore in the Socialist parties, it is not only correct but necessary to go back to the term "Socialist". We must now distinguish ourselves from the Communists as Lenin found it necessary to distinguish himself from the reformists. Another and very important reason why it is essential to drop the term "Communist", is the general hatred and contempt which Communist disruptive tactics have brought upon the Communists and the word "Communism". This is recognized even by the "Trotskyites" who in forming a new party together with the "Mustekites" have dropped the word "Communist" from the name of the party. To distinguish ourselves from the reformists in the S. P., it will be necessary to use the term "revolutionary Socialist".

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The suppression of all freedom of discussion within the Communist International, the victory of fascism in Germany and Austria, and the appearance of revolutionary left currents within the Socialist parties explain why some of us who have been members of the C. P. for a long time have joined the Socialist Party.

Undoubtedly, the suppression of freedom of discussion is not the primary cause for the failure of the C. I. Criticism and discussion were suppressed because the bureaucracy in power followed wrong policies and were afraid of criticism. Lack of criticism and discussion perpetuated the wrong policies and kept the bureaucracy in the saddle. The effect became a cause. Here however, is not the place to enter into an analysis of the wrong policies of the C. I. which led to the defeat of the revolutionary working class of many countries. The fact remains, that none who disagree with the Stalinite bureaucracy can

voice that disagreement and if he does, expulsion is the immediate punishment. In the name of discipline, the bureaucracy has imposed its will upon a bewildered membership which is politically so undeveloped that it is unconscious of the fact that it has no right to discuss. "Criticism" is allowed but it must be within the "party line". The "line" itself cannot be discussed. The doctrine of infallibility has not as yet been officially proclaimed but it exists to all intents and purposes.

There exists a vicious circle which has destroyed the last semblance of intellectual life in the various Communist parties. Because of the utter lack of criticism and discussion, the members are politically undeveloped; because they are politically undeveloped, they do not demand discussion and are not even aware that discussion is not permitted. The party is but an instrument for the sole purpose of carrying out the will of the Russian leadership of the C.I.

Some there are who readily admit that the inner regime of the Communist party stifles discussion and that erroneous policies result. In spite of that, however, they insist that the best thing to do is to remain within the party and keep quiet until conditions and events compel a change in tactics. A thoroughly false and dangerous ideal change in policy which is not the result of discussion and recognition of former mistakes but simply of blows on the head is of no great consequence. Furthermore, the very idea of consenting to be intellectually dishonest, must be repulsive to a revolutionary Marxist. A party that demands of its intelligent members not revolutionary discipline but silence on the pain of expulsion, is not a Marxist party but a caricature of such a party and represents a grave danger to the revolutionary movement.

The victory of the Nazis in Germany shook the very foundations of the world revolutionary movement. The greatest defeat the working-class ever suffered in any country brought consternation into the Socialist camp and for the first time in over a decade, cracked the complacency of a self satisfied bureaucracy and set into motion leftward moving currents that began an examination of principles and tactics which when put to the test were found wanting. Younger elements were not satisfied with the excuses offered by old leaders. The shame of a defeat without a struggle was overwhelming. A justified resentment against those who had the position of leadership without revolutionary intelligence, will, and courage to lead, swept through the ranks of the Socialists. In the Socialist parties of the various countries, a struggle commenced between left and right--a struggle which is still being waged and all indications are that the struggle will not cease until there is a complete separation between reformists and revolutionists.

Events in Austria carried the struggle to a higher level. The magnificent courage of the Austrian Socialist workers thrilled the Socialists of the whole world and caused them to regain confidence in themselves. But the question still remained: why such a wonderfully organized working class with such magnificent devotion and courage should go down to defeat? In Germany an excuse was possible; the working class was divided. In Austria, no such excuse could be given. The Socialist party was the only party. It was obvious that a united working class under the leadership of a single party or a united front of the workers where more than one party existed is not in itself sufficient for victory. Unity without revolutionary initia-

tive and the will to power could only lead to a heroic defeat which, to be sure, is much better than a surrender without a struggle but which nevertheless is a defeat and not a victory. Unity with revolutionary courage and initiative does not absolutely guarantee victory but without them victory is not even possible.

The shock of Germany and Austria changed the nature of the Socialist parties almost over night. I do not mean that it completely transformed them into revolutionary parties with revolutionary programs and leadership. But they were no longer the Social Democratic parties with an old and stable leadership firmly attached to capitalist democracy and adhering to a policy of gradualism. Left elements appeared; centrist elements came upon the scene; reformism instead of dominating the Socialist parties was driven into a corner and to the defensive.

That the Fascist victories in Europe had no effect whatsoever on the various Communist parties is a proposition which can hardly be maintained. But the nature of that effect was altogether different from the effect upon the Socialist parties. Within the latter questionings, examination, intellectual struggle and different currents. Within the former the same solid membership, the same bureaucratic leadership and the same ox-like obedience. Here and there cracks appeared but swift expulsion prevented any real shake-up. The bureaucracy changed its course somewhat. The theory of the "united front from below" was gradually shelved; now there is an undignified chafing and panting after the Socialist leaders. The theory of "social fascism" is hardly mentioned; instead we have the repeated assertion that the Socialists are "class brothers". Dual unionism is limping off the Communist stage. All these changes are not the result of discussion and recognition of past mistakes but of bureaucratic proclamation. Weird intellectual contortions are practised to show that the bureaucracy was, is and will be right. A pitifully trusting membership believes and follows.

Why should the defeats suffered by the working class in Germany and Austria have had different effects upon the Socialist and Communist parties? Because the Communist parties are essentially instruments in the hands of the Russian bureaucracy and the position of the Soviet bureaucracy has not been visibly shaken by the events in Germany and Austria. The strategic position of the Social Democratic party bureaucracies having been destroyed in Germany and in Austria, the hold of these bureaucracies upon the Socialist rank and file was lost and opposition from below could and did find expression.

Lenin proclaimed the death of the Second International in 1914 when the main parties of that International helped the capitalist class lead the working masses to the slaughter. If, by political death is meant the inability to play a revolutionary and progressive role in the labor movement the Fascist victories have shown the possibility of political resurrection, if not of the Second International as such, surely of the Socialist parties composing that International. The rise of left currents in the Socialist parties shows the existence of real political life in those parties; the religious-like obedience of the Communist party members is a clear indication that the Communist parties can play no progressive role in the labor movement and are therefore politically dead.

For an intelligent revolutionary Marxist there can be no question which party to join as between the Communist and Socialist party. If no other reason exists, then the one that in the Socialist party one is able to express one's views should be sufficient to determine one's choice.

Does joining the Socialist party mean that we have renounced our principles? Decidedly not. For myself, I can say that I still adhere to the principles of revolutionary Marxism as generally interpreted and developed by Lenin and Trotsky. It speaks volumes for the character of the Socialist party in Illinois when knowing that, I was taken in as a member. Of course, there are the Stalinist and near Stalinist slanderers and falsifiers who will howl from the housetops that my admission to the Socialist party shows that I have repented and given up revolutionary Marxism. The unvarnished truth is that I have not changed my principles but that the Socialist party has gone so far to the left that I have been admitted with my principles.

Is the Socialist party at the present moment the kind of a party that Gitlow, I, and the other comrades who have joined would like it to be? It is not. We do not claim that the Socialist party is a revolutionary Marxist party; we say that there are tendencies in the S.P. which are striving to make out of it a revolutionary party. We recognize that the Socialist party has no revolutionary program and that it has no consistent revolutionary trade union tactic. We say that there are left movements in the S.P. that will develop a revolutionary program and tactic. We have joined the Socialist party because we shall have the right to express our ideas and because we hope to develop and strengthen the militant left wing.

We, of course, recognize that the mere existence of freedom of discussion does not make a party a revolutionary party. A revolutionary party without discipline is unthinkable. Not the church-like discipline of the Communists but the discipline arising out of discussion and revolutionary conviction. To scoff at the freedom of discussion which exists at present in the Socialist party is to show a total misunderstanding of the importance of the present period in the development of the S.P. The freedom in the S.P. can and should be utilized by the revolutionary Marxists as well as by reformists.

But one is not confined to the alternative of joining the C.P. or the S.P. A new party has been born. With a program far more correct and revolutionary than the declaration of principles adopted by the last convention of the S.P. That party, its proponents claim, avoids the mistakes of both the Communist and Socialist parties. It offers the intelligent Marxist the chance to avoid joining either the Catholic church which is called the Communist party or the confused mixup of out and out reformists with revolutionary Marxists which is the Socialist party.

The idea of a party distinct from both the Communist and Socialist parties gained great headway when Trotsky decided soon after the Nazi victory that the Communist International was politically dead and that the Left Opposition could no longer assume to be a fraction of that International but must attempt to build a new International and new parties. A few groups outside of the groups composing the Left Opposition favored that idea and for a short time it looked as if a new International could and would be created within a reasonable period of time.

More than a year passed and the idea of new parties and a new International did not appear to arouse any great enthusiasm amongst the revolutionary workers. The drift away from the two old parties which Trotsky expected because of their miserable showing in the struggle against the fascists did not materialize, at least at a rate speedy

enough to make a real impression. The creation of a new International by Lenin in 1919 was successful because of the dazzling brilliance of the victorious Russian Revolution. The disheartening defeats of the workers at the hands of the Fascists might furnish a valid reason for proclaiming the necessity of new parties and a new International but could hardly generate the enthusiasm necessary to the actual building of such parties and such an International. Then again, the Fascist victories created a tremendous sentiment for unity in the hearts of the class conscious workers. To these workers, the main reason for the defeat of the German workers was the lack of unity and they began to exert a considerable pressure on their leaders to achieve such unity. Under these conditions the idea of a new party appeared as another force further in division and could not and did not have any great attractive force. The result was that the Trotsky groups and their allies continued to play an insignificant role.

Fundamentally it was this situation that led Trotsky, who is the greatest living exponent of Marxism as a method of analysis and a guide to action and not as a dead dogma, to urge his followers in France to join the Socialist party of that country. It was clear that if a new party is to be created, the revolutionary Marxists must achieve close contact with those elements of the working class who are drifting to the left and that contact could be achieved only by joining the Socialist party. Some of Trotsky's followers howled about the principle of the independence of the revolutionary party not realizing that what was necessary first of all, was to build a base for the new party, and then consider its independence. Of course, other reasons were given by Trotsky in his articles favoring his policy, but the chief reason was the obvious isolation of his group.

I advocated that the Trotsky group in this country follow a similar policy. I was accused of not understanding the differences between the situation in this country and that of France. The differences are so obvious that they need hardly be mentioned. The tense situation in the struggle between the workers and the Fascists, the large influence of the Socialist party in France, the threatened isolation of the Trotsky group by the united front of the Socialist and Communist parties cannot be duplicated in the United States. But it is my opponents who mechanically argue that because of these differences, the idea of joining the Socialist party is wrong.

The fact remains that the "Trotskyites" are just as isolated in this country as they were in France. Their joining with the small group of "Mustekites" to form a new party will not in any way diminish their isolation. Composed largely of intellectuals except in isolated spots and having no connection with the American Labor Movement they can play a significant role only if they can make contact with some leftward moving group of some numbers and influence. The only such group is the Socialist party, where the ideas of revolutionary Marxism can find root and grow. To create an insignificant group with a revolutionary program and proclaim itself a party without roots or influence in the labor movement may satisfy some who like to play the part of big frogs in a small pond but is far from being revolutionary realism.

Tempting to the leaders of the new party is the huge mass of American workers following neither the Communist nor the Socialist parties. The idea is repeated ad nauseam that because of the existence of such a mass of workers the new party has as much chance as any other party

claiming to represent the interests of the working class. There is apparent plausibility in that argument, but it is essentially false. The Communists reasoned in a similar fashion when they said that because most of the American workers are unorganized it would be correct to create dual unions. It is undeniably true that the vast majority of the American workers follows the capitalist parties but it is also true that the main currents on the political field representing the opposition to the capitalist parties are the Socialist and Communist currents. Workers who decide to fight for the abolition of capitalism will go to one of those recognized currents and not to a small and insignificant group. Why an ordinary American worker who begins to see the necessity of displacing the capitalist with a Socialist system should join a group that is large enough to hold occasional classes in the "Permanent Revolution" (an activity the importance of which I do not wish to minimize) is beyond the understanding of ordinary mortals.

Far better is it for a revolutionary group to attach itself to the Socialist party which, it is true does not yet possess a revolutionary program but which has a large number of leftward moving elements who lend a willing ear to the teachings of revolutionary Marxism. I repeat. The revolutionary Marxist joining the Socialist party need not renounce his program but on the contrary, make his program a living factor in the revolutionary movement by getting people to accept it and rally around it.

Many have asked me what is our ultimate perspective in joining the Socialist party? Do we intend to make an attempt to split the party or to reform it? One thing is absolutely certain. We are bitterly opposed to the idea of coming into the party for the purpose of getting some of its members to leave it. We shall fight strenuously even those with whom we have been closely associated up to now if they come in or send some one into the party for the purpose of splitting. Our object is to build the Socialist party, to revolutionize its membership; if we can, to make of it a party that will have all the characteristics of a revolutionary Marxist party. Is that possible? I do not know and no one knows. I shall act as if that were possible. Of course, I expect to see struggles in the S. P. between reformists and militants. I even expect to see splits. But I hope that those who will split will be a hopeless minority of reformists. We are acting on this premise: that at the present time the only group in the United States which shows signs of political life in the working class movement and which gives promise of being the base for that revolutionary party which it is necessary to create to lead the working class to victory is the Socialist party.

The theoreticians of the new party console themselves with the claim that the real militants of the Socialist party will be attracted to the new party, and that the progress to the left will be hastened if the small number of revolutionary elements will form its own party. In other words, the new party people consider themselves a sort of priesthood jealously guarding the laws given to them by some Moses and are willing to teach these laws to the erring sinners of the Socialist party. From my short experience within the Socialist party, I can say that whereas before I joined I could get no Socialist to listen to me, now they discuss with me, argue with me and take me into their confidence.

Let those who fear for and want to guard the purity of their doctrine remain outside. As for me, I have sufficient confidence in my revolutionary convictions not to fear that I shall be contaminated by the membership of the Socialist party. I have joined the present and the future of the Socialist party and not its past. I have joined the militant revolutionary elements of the Socialist party. I have differences of opinion with them, but I am willing to discuss with them, to argue with them in a comradely way, to fight with them shoulder to shoulder against the common enemy, yes to learn from them and together with them build a party that will be firm in the principles of revolutionary Marxism, decisive in revolutionary action, a party that will lead the American working class into battle and to victory.