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Marx *and* Engels

on

Revolution in America

by

HEINZ NEUMANN



INTRODUCTION

Marx and Engels were not only the theoreticians but, in the first place, they were the leaders of the proletarian revolution. It is in the study of the conditions of the proletarian struggle and its victory that they perfected the science of Marxism, the science of the proletarian revolution.

In the First International these men saw an instrument of proletarian struggle and leadership. Thru their theoretical works they supplied a guide to this leadership. Both Marx and Engels equipped themselves in the most painstaking fashion with a thorough knowledge of the conditions in the various countries so that they might give authoritative advice and instruction to the leaders of the working class movement all over Europe. Even in their old age, they set themselves to master new languages to enable them to draw from the literature and journals of the respective countries a knowledge of their various conditions. And so we find displayed in their advice and instruction to their followers an intimate knowledge of the subjective and objective conditions of the labor movement, a knowledge that would surprise any native student.

The body of this little booklet is made up of excerpts from letters written by Marx and Engels on conditions in the United States. To a large extent these conditions still prevail, at least in so far as they deal with the subjective factors of the proletarian revolution. The ideology prevailing among

the American workers in those days showed a much greater resistance to counter-acting forces than Marx and Engels had hoped. Marx and Engels misjudged the tempo of the process of dissipation of the illusions obsessing the American working class but they were entirely correct in their estimation of the forces and methods that will finally destroy them.

All these letters and quotations speak for themselves. But a few words must be said as to their origin.

The heroic struggle of the Paris proletariat for the Commune in 1871 had driven home to the ruling classes of those days the reality of the danger of a proletarian revolution. No wonder, then, that, to their ever-present hatred of the revolutionary aspirations of their wage-slaves, they now added a haunting dread. The International Workingmen's Association (The First International) came in for a full share of this hatred and fear. The place of the "Zinoviev letters" of today was taken in those days by letters from that "arch fiend," Karl Marx. It is but little known today that in the first telegraphic reports of the Chicago conflagration (October, 1871), it was not Mrs. Kelly's cow that caused it, but—the International Workingmen's Association. The General Council of that body was fully justified when it sarcastically complained that the tornado devastating the West Indies about the same time was not booked to its account.

The defeat of the Commune brought the inner differences of the International to a head. Although the Centralists under the leadership of Marx

and Engels defeated the Autonomists behind Michael Bakunin at the Congress of the International at The Hague in September, 1872, yet it became clear that only radical measures could save it from complete dissolution. In fact, neither Marx nor Engels had any hopes that it would be saved. But they wanted to secure it an honorable death. With the General Council in London it was certain that the Blanquists would dominate it. To establish the headquarters in any other European capital was impossible under the existing conditions of general reaction. So Marx insisted on the removal of the General Council to New York.

The center of the General Council in New York became its local leader, F. A. Sorge.

F. A. Sorge had taken an active part in the revolution of 1848 in Germany. For some time thereafter he lived in exile in Switzerland. In 1851 he went to London where he became acquainted with the Communist Club and with Karl Marx. When later he emigrated to America he settled in New York where, in 1857, he founded the Communist Club which later became the American Section of the First International. Sorge died in Hoboken, in 1906. His whole life he had devoted to the revolutionary movement of the proletariat and the American movement, especially, is indebted to him for its first Marxian education.

The removal of the General Council of the International to New York did not terminate the leadership of Marx and Engels. Both kept in close touch with affairs and numerous letters full of advice, instructions, and suggestions, written by both Marx

and Engels to Sorge, testify to this. The need for a centralized leadership for the International was always clear to Marx and Engels. The basic issue of the struggle between Marx and Bakunin was whether the General Council of the International should be merely a statistical bureau and general postoffice for the exchange of views of the various sections or whether it should be the instrument of international leadership; Bakunin stood for the former concept; Marx fought for the latter.

The First International ceased to exist with the resignation of Sorge from its General Council in 1873. It had completed its task—that of explaining to the working class the conditions and methods of its emancipation. The death of the First International did not, however, mean a death blow to the idea of a centralized leadership for the international movement of the proletariat. The Communist International, under the leadership of Lenin, has become the realization of Engels' hopes: "that the new International be not merely one of propaganda but one of action, built upon the undisguised and unadulterated principles of Marxism, Communism." The Communist International is the rightful heir of the First International Workingmen's Association.

Some of the letters quoted in this booklet were addressed to Mrs. Florence Kelley Wischnewetsky. This is Mrs. Florence Kelley, at present general secretary of the National Consumers' League. Born in 1859, Mrs. Kelley graduated from Cornell College in 1872 and upon her graduation went abroad and studied at Zurich and Heidelberg. While abroad she visited England and there came in con-

tact with Friedrich Engels. She became interested in socialism and, under his supervision, translated Engels' classic work, "The Conditions of the Working Classes in England," which was published for the first time in English in New York in 1886. After her return to America she continued to correspond with Engels regarding American affairs. Before his death Sorge was able to obtain Engels' letters to her and turn them over together with his own to the New York Public Library, where they still remain and where most of the originals of the many quotations in this booklet may be found. Florence Kelley was one of the organizers of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society and has been for many years on their executive committee. In the last ten years or so her former close contact with the socialist movement lessened to a considerable extent.

The study of this pamphlet will help many of those active in the revolutionary labor movement in the United States better to understand the problems of the movement. Comrade Heinz Neumann, one of the leaders of the Communist Party of Germany, performed a real service for the American proletariat by compiling and analyzing this valuable material from the writings of the founders of the International Communist movement, Marx and Engels.

The reader who is familiar with the recent discussions in the American Communist movement concerning the role of the Labor Party movement in this country and its services in politically awakening the American masses to elementary forms of

class consciousness and class action will notice the remarkable applicability of many of the statements and analyses of Marx and Engels to just this problem. A careful study of this material will cast considerable light on the Labor Party question that is now one of the fundamental problems facing the American proletariat and its Party.

Agitprop Department,
WORKERS (COMMUNIST) PARTY
OF AMERICA.

Marx and Engels on Revolution in America

By Heinz Neumann.

IN the imperialist epoch the United States assumed the role of the economically and politically predominating country of the bourgeoisie which England had played in the period of the capitalism of free competition. America is the most powerful mainstay of imperialism. The European revolution cannot be successful without the help of the masses of the American working class.

Leninism always combatted the theory of the Second International, according to which the course of the revolution in the various capitalist countries was dependent upon the "stage of development of the forces of production." Lenin demonstrated theoretically and practically that the proletariat is not first victorious in those countries where the productive forces are most highly developed, but in those countries where the world system of imperialism is weakest and the revolutionary forces of the proletariat and of its allied peasant masses are strongest.

But Lenin's theory of the proletarian revolution means more than this. In his polemic against

Trotsky's theory of the permanent revolution, which maintained that the victory of the proletarian dictatorship in Russia was only possible "with the state aid of the working class in the more highly developed countries," Lenin pointed out repeatedly that the proletariat of the highly developed capitalist countries already become the strongest allies of the victorious proletariat in the backward countries even **before** the establishment of their own dictatorship. Not only the "state aid" but the very revolutionary struggle for the seizure of power in the capitalist countries renders the consolidation of the proletarian dictatorship possible and the development of socialism in the existing Soviet Republics.

When applied to the perspective of the European, especially of the Central European and primarily the German revolution, the Leninist theory requires the correct estimate of the role of the American proletariat and consequently the establishment of a revolutionary mass Party in America as a **decisive factor** in gaining and defending the dictatorship of the proletariat in Germany. The development of imperialism after the first world war made America **the** metropolis of the capitalist world. Germany and a constantly increasing number of other European states which formerly were amongst the older and dominant capitalist countries, sink to the level of economically and politically backward countries, to industrial colonies of American finance capital. Although these countries had already accomplished the bourgeois revolution a long time ago, they

play a role with respect to American finance capital similar to that which Russia played with regard to West European capital.

The Dawes regime lends this development not only historical, but immediate political significance for Germany. The German proletariat can only then conquer in its fight against American Dawes' rule, if it be supported by an extensive revolutionary mass movement in America. As long as the rule of American finance capital does not meet with resistance in the metropolis itself, as long as the Communist Party of America remains a small sectarian party, as long as the great organizations of the American working class remain unchallenged in the hands of the representatives of the most reactionary labor aristocracy—in short, as long as no revolutionary mass Party exists in America—the strength of the German bourgeoisie, supported by American finance capital, and the difficulties of the German revolution, are increased ten-fold.

To deny this fact signifies the rejection of the Leninist viewpoint of the direct support of the revolution in comparatively backward countries, by the class struggle of the proletariat in the imperialist metropolis. It signifies renouncing the revolutionary estimate of the role of the American proletariat in the present stage of the European revolution, and the recognition of the Trotskyist theory of "state aid," which, as an inseparable component of the theory of the "permanent revolution," in this case ends in nothing else but Kautsky's "doctrine of productive forces."

Marx and Engels clearly realized the future role of America in the class struggle of the proletariat. In his third preface to the "Communist Manifesto" in 1883, Engels stated: "The limited extent of the spread of the proletarian movement at the time the Manifesto was first published (January, 1848), is best demonstrated by the last chapter: 'The Attitude of the Communists of the Various Opposition Parties.' First of all, Russia and the United States are missing in this chapter. . . ." Engels calls both countries "the great reserve of European reaction." He recalls the period "in which emigration to the United States absorbed the surplus of the European proletariat." The United States, like Russia, supplied "Europe with raw materials, and at the same time served as a market for the sale of the latter's industrial products." Engles then continues:

"Both functioned thus, in one way or another, as pillars of the European social order.

"How all this has changed today! European emigration has rendered possible the colossal development of North American agriculture, which, through its competition, is shaking the foundations of large as well as small land ownership in Europe. At the same time it enabled the United States to begin with the exploitation of its rich industrial resources with *such* energy and upon such a scale **THAT WITHIN A SHORT PERIOD THE INDUSTRIAL MONOPOLY OF WESTERN EUROPE MUST BE BROKEN.** (Emphasis here, as well as in all following quotations, mine—H. N.)

“And both these circumstances REACT UPON AMERICA IN A REVOLUTIONARY DIRECTION. The small and medium property of the farmer working for himself, the foundation of America’s whole political system, falls more and more victim to the competition of the giant farms, while at the same time, is formed for the first time a NUMEROUS PROLETARIAT in the industrial districts together with a FABULOUS CONCENTRATION OF CAPITAL.”

This utterance immediately precedes the famous prophecy that “the Russian revolution will be the signal for a workers’ revolution in the West.” Both of these statements fall in that period of Engels’ work, in which he had already recognized the decisive changes characterizing the transformation from the capitalism of free competition to imperialism. With the Paris Commune, the period of the First International had to all intents concluded, although it continued to exist formally. Marx and Engels continue to view the problems of the labor movement from the standpoint of the basic principles of the International Working Men’s Association. However, at the same time, they seek a new form of labor movement which, corresponding with the changed historical form of development of capitalism itself, rises above the level of the past. In “The Civil War in France” and in the “Letters to Kugelmann,” the Marxian theory of the State is developed to its utmost issue; at the same time the leading role of the Communist Party in the struggle of the proletariat is definitely expressed. Lenin always

refers to these works in his own writings; he looked to them for guidance upon the most important problems of the proletarian revolution. There is no doubt that the passages in the correspondence of Marx and Engels dealing with the American labor movement ought to come under this head. These letters cover the historical content of an entire generation—from 1868 to 1895.

Leninism is not, as several opportunists maintain, only a sub-division of Marxism. It is neither the Marxism of the "early period" nor the Marxism of the "mature period." Leninism is the whole of Marxism in the epoch of imperialism and of the proletarian revolution. But no Chinese wall separates the epoch of imperialism from the epoch of the capitalism of free competition. Between the epoch of the bourgeois-democratic revolution and the epoch of the proletarian world revolution there lie no insuperable barriers. Between them there lies a period of transition. In the ranks of revolutionary Marxism this period of transition in its broadest sense is embodied in the left, revolutionary wing of the Second International. In a narrow sense it is expressed in the work of Marx's and Engels' concluding years, which historically already tower over the period prior to the Paris Commune and almost directly intertwine with the foundations of Leninism.

For this reason it is not admissible to consider the statements of Marx and Engels upon the problems of the American labor movement as "quotations from a bygone period." They belong rather, to the tactical doctrines of Marx and

Engels, which on all essentials of method agree with the tactics of Lenin and which in the main still apply today to the problems of our tactics.

II. METHOD.

IN his letter to Sorge dated September 16, 1887, Engels wrote as follows upon the American labor movement:

"In spite of all, the masses can only be set in motion in a way suitable to the respective countries and adapted to the prevailing conditions—and this is usually a roundabout way. But everything else is of minor importance if only they are really aroused."

The method with which Engels approached the problems of the American labor movement required, therefore, firstly, the consideration of these specific national characteristics of the country, without the schematic application of the "ways" which had been tested in other countries, as the only correct ones; and secondly, shifting the tactical focus of interest to the "real arousing" of the American laboring masses, in which connection all doctrinary questions are of "minor importance."

In his letter to Mrs. Wischnewetsky, dated September 15, 1887, Engels remarks:

"Fortunately the movement in America has now got such a start that neither George, nor Powderly, nor the German intriguers can spoil or stop it. Only it will take UNEXPECTED FORMS. The real movement always looks different to what it ought to have done in the eyes of those who were tools in preparing it."

That signifies, thirdly, that European experience does not suffice to decide *a priori* upon rigid forms of the American labor movement. These forms can only be developed in the course of American practice itself. There is no recipe for them. They will be "unexpected."

In Engels' letter to Sorge dated April 8, 1891, he writes:

"It proves how useless is a—theoretically for the most part correct—platform if it is unable to get into contact with **THE ACTUAL NEEDS** of the people."

Engels here wants to demonstrate to the sectarians of the Hyndman group in England as well as to the German emigrants of the "Socialist Labor Party" in America, the necessity of gaining primarily the support of the workers organized in the trade unions. Of importance methodologically in this connection is, fourthly, the fact that Engels sets the actual requirements of the labor movement higher than the theoretical platform. In his letter dated June 10, 1891, he states expressly that the transition from a sect to a mass party is even more important than an "orthodox" Marxist platform:

"The comical phenomenon is very significant that here, as in America, those persons who parade as orthodox Marxians, those who have reduced our **IDEAS OF MOVEMENT** to a rigid dogma which must be memorized, that those people figure here as well as over there as a pure sect."

The method, by means of which Engels determined the tactics of the American Communists,

contains the following four salient points: The point of origin is the specific national peculiarities of the American conditions. The principal task is, to begin with, the "real arousing" of the workers. The forms of tactic can only be found through the practice of the movement itself. Linking up with the actual needs of the working class is of more importance than the theoretical platform.

He sums up this method in a classic form in his letter to Mrs. Wischnewetsky dated January 27, 1887:

"The movement in America, just at this moment, is I believe best seen from across the ocean. On the spot personal bickerings and local disputes must obscure much of the grandeur of it. And THE ONLY THING that could really delay its march would be the consolidation of these differences into established sects. To some extent that will be unavoidable, but the less of it the better. . . . Our theory is a theory of evolution, not of dogma to be learned by heart and to be repeated mechanically. The less it is hammered into the Americans from the outside and the more they test it through their own experience. . . . the more will it become part of their own flesh and blood."

III.

The Historical Peculiarities of the American Labor Movement.

BOTH England and America have always offered a number of particularly knotty problems for the exponents of Marxism. In practice, both

countries were characterized by the absence of a revolutionary workers' party; in the theoretical field, they led Marx and Engels to utter the well-known epigram—that the proletarian revolution could take place in a peaceful manner in England and America. Kautsky employed this phrase against Lenin in the polemic about the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin replied in his pamphlet against Kautsky:

"In the 'seventies, was there anything which made England and America . . . exceptions? It should be a matter of course for anyone in the least degree acquainted with the requirements of science in the field of historical problems that this question must be raised. Not to put this question signifies falsifying science and being satisfied with sophistry. If this question is raised, however, there can be no doubt of the answer; the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat signifies the rule of force against the bourgeois. The necessity of this rule of force is, as Marx and Engels repeatedly and at length. . . pointed out, primarily conditioned by the existence of militarism and of bureaucracy. At a time when Marx made this statement, in the 'seventies of the nineteenth century, these institutions did not exist in England and America! (However, they are now to be found in England as well as in America)."

The causes of the late development of these typical phenomena of the capitalist state in England were the existence of the industrial monopoly and the century-old tradition of parliamentarism. In America, the historical period of feudalism had never existed; America has been demo-

cratic from the very beginning of its existence as an independent state. While in England capitalist monopoly delayed the development of a bureaucratic-militaristic state machine, in America the diametrically opposite cause, the immaturity of capitalist development, acted in the same direction. Engels was already able in the 'eighties to state that on the one hand England's industrial monopoly had been shaken to its foundations while on the other hand, the United States was changing from an agrarian country into an industrial power. Thus, almost simultaneously, the harmonizing of the most developed and the least developed capitalist countries took place, with the general legal line of development of the bourgeois state as analyzed by Marx. The premises for the "exception" to the Marxian theory of the state, thus vanished.

In a similar fashion, but much more slowly, the approach of the American labor movement to the European type is in process. The British worker already began this assimilation to the proletarian class struggle of the continent in the 'nineties. At that time Engels established the fact of the development of a "new unionism." This new tendency in the British labor movement required forty years to mature—its most recent fruits are the radicalization of the British trade unions through the Purcell group. The class struggle of the American proletariat has had to travel a much more difficult path. The after-effects of the downfall of an industrial monopoly were easier to overcome than the influence of bourgeois ideol-

ogy in America, the derivation of which from the feudal period is not evident to the American workers in consequence of the lack of an American feudalism. The penetrating eye of Engels sees in this specific characteristic of America's history the reason for American workers' well-known "contempt for theory," which was one of the greatest obstacles to the formation of a revolutionary mass party. He writes to Sorge on September 16, 1886:

"In a country as elemental as America, which has developed in a purely bourgeois fashion without any feudal past, but has taken over from England a mass ideology surviving from the feudal period. such as English common law, religion and sectarianism, and in which the necessity of practical work and of the concentration of capital has produced a general contempt for all theories, which is only now beginning to disappear in educated and scientific circles,—in such a country the people must come to realize their own social interests by making mistake after mistake. Nor will the workers be spared that; the confusion of trade unions, socialists, Knights of Labor, etc. will continue for some time to come, and they will only learn by injuring themselves. But the chief thing is that they have been set in motion. . ."

In another letter, dated February 8, 1890, Engels draws the conclusion that this "elemental conservative" ideology of the American workers can be overcome "only through experience," and only through getting in contact with the trade unions:

"The people of Schleswig-Holstein and their descendants in England and America, cannot be converted by preaching; this stiff-necked and conceited crew must learn through their own experience. They are doing that from year to year, but they are elementally conservative—just because America is so purely bourgeois, has absolutely no feudal past, and is therefore, proud of its purely bourgeois organization—and therefore, will only be freed through experience from old traditional intellectual rubbish. Hence with trade unions and such like, must be the beginning, if there is to be a mass movement, and every step forward must be forced upon them by a defeat. But, however, after the first step beyond the bourgeois viewpoint has been made, things will move faster, just like everything in America. . . and then the foreign element in the nation will make its influence felt by its greater mobility."

From the rise of a mass movement, therefore, Engels hopes not only for the revolutionization of the "native" workers, but at the same time the overcoming of a sectarian spirit and of doctrinairism amongst the foreign-born proletarians. The shifting of the center of gravity to the native workers in the trade unions is in no way intended to limit the historical role of the "foreign element," but to extend it by the exploitation of the latter's "greater mobility" and by linking together the two elements of the American working class.

Engels considered the antagonism between the native-born and the immigrants one of the principal obstacles to the development of a mass party.

The danger of this antagonism consists in the fact that it coincides with the class antagonism between the labor aristocracy and the mass of unskilled wage workers. The connection of the national with the social distinctions within the working class is for him the most important reason for the slow development of the American labor movement.

“It appears to me that your great obstacle in America is the privileged position of the native-born worker. Until 1848, a native-born, permanent working class was the exception rather than the rule. The scattered beginnings of the latter in the East and in the cities could still hope to become farmers or members of the bourgeoisie. Such a class has now developed and has organized itself to a large degree in trade unions. But it still assumes an aristocratic position, and leaves (as it may) the ordinary, poorly-paid trades to the immigrants, of whom only a small percentage enter the aristocratic trade unions. These immigrants are, however, divided into nationalities, which do not understand one another, and for the most part do not understand the language of the country. And your bourgeoisie understands even better than the Austrian government, how to play off one nationality against another. . . so that, I believe, there exist in New York differences in the standard of living of the workers such as are out of the question anywhere else. . .”

In the same letter to Schlueter, dated March 30, 1892, Engels explains the rhythm of the American labor movement through the coincidence of this national and social line of demarcation within the proletariat:

"In such a country repeated starts, followed by just as certain relapses, are unavoidable. The only difference is that the starts grow more and more vehement, and the relapses less and less paralyzing, and that on the whole things do go forward. But I consider one thing certain: the purely bourgeois foundation without any fraud behind it, the correspondingly gigantic energy of development which manifests itself even in the insane exaggeration of the present protective tariff system, will some day bring about a change, which will astonish the whole world. When the Americans once begin, they will do so with an energy and virulence, in comparison with which we in Europe will be children."

Therefore, Engels considers as of the greatest importance, not the formation of a purely immigrant party, but "of a real mass movement amongst the English speaking population:"

"For the first time there exists a real mass movement amongst the English-speaking (Engels refers to the preparation for strikes to obtain the eight-hour day and to the enormous growth of the Order of the Knights of Labor in spring, 1886—just before the bomb-throwing affair in Chicago. H. N.) It is unavoidable that this at the beginning moves hesitatingly, clumsily, unclearly and unknowingly. That will all be cleared up; the movement will and must develop through its own mistakes. Theoretical ignorance is the characteristic of all young peoples, but so is practical speed of development.

"Just as all preaching is of no avail in England, until the actual necessity is at hand, so too in Amer-

ica. And this necessity is present in America and is being realized. The entrance of the masses of native workers into the movement in America is for me one of the great events of 1886. . ." (Letter to Sorge dated April 29, 1886).

In his correspondence with the American Socialists, which lasted for decades, Engels repeatedly emphasized that the German Marxist Socialist Labor Party is of much less importance than the development of a mass party of the native-born workers, even if the latter is not consciously Marxist. On the other hand he replied to the objections which were already then raised by the German immigrants, to the effect that he was thus "denying the role of the Party," and was "showing preference for the 100 per cent Americans," with the sentences of the above-quoted letter; that amongst the conscious Marxian immigrants, there still remains

"A nucleus, which retains the theoretical insight into the nature and the course of the entire movement, keeps in progress the process of fermentation, and finally again comes to the top."

Engels writes even more lucidly to Mrs. Wischnewsky on February 9, 1887:

"As soon as there was a national American working class movement independent of the Germans, my standpoint was clearly indicated by the facts of the case. The great national movement, no matter what its first form, is the real starting point of American working class development; if the Germans join it

in order to help it or to hasten its development, in the right direction, they may do a deal of good and play a decisive part in it: if they stand aloof, they will dwindle down into a dogmatic sect, and will be brushed aside as people who do not understand their own principles."

The problems of the mass party and of its relation to the trade unions, is dealt with by Engels in close connection with the, at that time, equally acute trade union problem in England. In his letter to Sorge dated December 7, 1889, he reminds the American socialists of the Hyndman Social-Democratic Federation in England—which should serve them as a warning—which was "Marxist," it is true, but which became a sect in consequence of its fanatic aversion to the trade union movement:

"Here it is demonstrated that a great nation cannot have something hammered into it in such a simple dogmatic and doctrinaire fashion, even if one has the best theory, as well as trainers who have grown up in these special living conditions and who are relatively better than those in the S. L. P. The movement is finally under way, and, as I believe, for good. But not directly socialists; and those persons amongst the British who have best understood our theory, are outside of it; Hyndman, because he is an incorrigible brawler, and Bax, because he is a savant without practical experience. The movement is first of all formally a trade union movement, but entirely different from

the old trade unions of the skilled laborers, of the labor aristocracy.

"These people are attacking the problem in an altogether different way, are leading much more colossal masses into battle, are shaking the foundations of society much more profoundly, and are making much more far-reaching demands; the eight-hour day, a general federation of all organizations, complete solidarity. . . moreover, these people consider their demands of the moment as only provisional, although they themselves do not yet know the goal towards which they are striving. But this vague notion is deeply enough embedded in them to influence them to elect only declared socialists as their leaders. Just as all the others, they must learn through their own experience, and through the consequences of their own mistakes. But that will not last very long since they, in contradiction to the old trade unions, deceive with scornful laughter any reference to the identity of the interests of capital and labor."

Eighteen years prior to this letter, Karl Marx wrote in his letter to F. Bolte, a member of the New York Provisional Federal Council, the following famous passage:

"The International was founded in order to set the real organization of the working class for the struggle in the place of the socialist or semi-socialist sects: The original statutes as well as the inaugural address show that at a glance. On the other hand, the International would not have been able to maintain itself, if the course of history had not already destroyed sectarianism. The development of socialist sectarianism has

always been inversely proportional to that of the real labor movement. As long as the sects are justified (historically), the working class is still not ripe enough for an independent historical movement. As soon as it reaches this maturity, all sects are essentially reactionary. Meanwhile, there has been repeated in the history of the International what history proves everywhere. The obsolete endeavors to re-establish and to maintain itself within the newly gained form.

“And the history of the International was an incessant struggle of the General Council against the sects and the endeavors of amateurs, who try to maintain themselves against the real movement of the working class within the International.” (Letter to Bolte, dated November 23, 1871.)

As examples of these sectarian tendencies, which time and again attempt “to re-establish and to maintain themselves” within the International Working Men’s Association, Marx mentions the Proudhonists in France, the Lassaleans in Germany, and the Bakuninists in Italy and Spain. He adds in the same letter:

“It is a matter of course that the General Council does not support in America what it combats in Europe. The decisions 1, 2 and 3 and IX now give the New York Committee the legal weapon to put an end to all sectarianism and amateur groups, and in case of need to expel them.”

The decisions, 2 and 3 of the London Conference of the I. W. M. A., forbid all sectarian names of the sections, branches, etc., and provide for their exclusive designation as branches or sec-

tions of the International Working Men's Association with the addition of the name of the locality. Decision IX emphasizes the necessity of the political effectiveness of the working class, and declares that the latter's economic movement and political activity are inseparably united.

This dialectic relationship of the economic and the political aspects of the labor movement, were already at that time one of the chief problems in the tactical discussion in America. In a postscript to the same letter to Bolte, Marx again defines the inseparable unity of the economic and the political struggle in one of those famous passages, which are again and again quoted by European Marxists, but which today very few know are written for the socialists of America, just like Marx's criticism of the sects.

"N. B. to political movement: the political movement of the working class naturally has as its goal the conquest of political power, and to that end is necessary of course, a previous organization of the working class, developed to a certain degree, which arises of itself from the latter's economic struggles.

"On the other hand, however, every movement in which the working class as a class faces the ruling classes and attempts to force its will upon them by pressure from without, is a political movement and in this manner there everywhere arises from the scattered economic movement of the workers a political movement, that is, a movement of the class, in order to fight for its interests in a general form, in a form which possesses general, socially compulsory force. When these movements are subordinate to a certain

previous organization, they are just as much means towards the development of the latter organization.

“Where the working class is not yet sufficiently advanced in its organization, in order to undertake a decisive campaign against the collective power, i. e., the political power, of the ruling classes, it must under all circumstances be trained for this by incessant agitation against the hostile political attitude of the ruling class towards us. Failing, it remains a plaything in the latter's hands . . .”

IV.

The Formation of an Independent Working Class Party.

AS early as July 25, 1877, Marx wrote to Engels:

“What do you think of the workers of the United States? This first explosion against the associated oligarchy of capital, which has arisen since the Civil War, will naturally again be suppressed, but can very well form **THE POINT OF ORIGIN FOR THE CONSTITUTION OF AN EARNEST WORKERS' PARTY.** The policy of the new president will make the **NEGROES**, and the great expropriations of land (exactly the fertile land) in favor of railways, mining, etc., companies will make **THE PEASANTS OF THE WEST**, who are already very dissatisfied, **ALLIES OF THE WORKERS.** So that a nice sauce is being stirred over there, and the transference of the center of the International to the United States may obtain a very remarkable post festum opportuneness.”

Marx thus demanded, in consequence of the changes which had taken place in the United States since the Civil War, the "constitution of an earnest workers' party." In this connection it is of great importance that he emphasized the special role of the farmers in view of the agrarian crisis and of the land expropriation in direct connection with the formation of the mass party of the proletariat.

A decade later Engels touches upon the same problem in his letter to Sorge dated November 29, 1886. He clearly and unmistakably demands that the American socialists work within the Knights of Labor to arouse the masses. Despite his designating this order as one of "confused principles and a ridiculous organization," he demands that the American Marxists "build up within this still wholly plastic mass a nucleus of persons," who will have to take over after the inevitable split of this "Third Party" the leadership of the latter's proletarian elements:

"To tell the truth, the Germans have not been able to use their theory as a lever to set the American masses in motion. To a great extent they do not understand the theory themselves and treat it in a doctrinaire and dogmatic fashion as if it were something which must be committed to memory, but which then suffices for all purposes without further ado. FOR THEM IT IS A CREDO, NOT A GUIDE FOR ACTION . . . hence the American masses must seek their own road and APPEAR for the moment to have found it in the K. of L. whose confused principles and ridiculous organization APPEAR to con-

form to their own confusion. However, according to what I hear, the K. of L. are A REAL POWER in New England and in the West, and are becoming more so day by day as a result of the brutal opposition of the capitalists. I believe that it is necessary to work within it, TO BUILD UP WITHIN THIS STILL WHOLLY PLASTIC MASS A NUCLEUS OF PERSONS, UNDERSTANDING THE MOVEMENT AND ITS GOALS, AND THUS OF THEMSELVES TAKE OVER THE GUIDANCE OF AT LEAST A SECTION IN THE COMING UNAVOIDABLE SPLIT OF THE PRESENT 'ORDER.' . . . The first great step, which is of primary importance in every country first entering the movement, is always THE CONSTITUTION OF THE WORKERS AS AN INDEPENDENT POLITICAL PARTY NO MATTER OF WHAT KIND, SO LONG AS IT IS ONLY A DISTINCT WORKERS' PARTY . . . That the first program of this Party is still confused and extremely deficient, that it sets up H. George as its leader, are unavoidable evils, which, however, are only temporary. The masses must have the opportunity and the time to develop themselves; and they only have this opportunity as soon as they have their own movement—no matter in what form, if only it be their own movement—in which they will be driven forward by their own mistakes and will grow wise through injury to themselves."

Engels compares—in 1886—the role of the Marxists in the American Labor movement with the role which the "Kommunistenbund" had to play amongst the workers' societies before 1848. At the same time, however, he points out the dif-

ferences in order to avoid the opportunist interpretation of any schematic comparison of the situation of the American labor movement at that time with "the situation in Europe prior to 1848":

"Only that things will now move forward in America INFINITELY MORE RAPIDLY; that the movement should have obtained such success in the elections after only eight months' existence is entirely unprecedented. And what is still lacking will be supplied by the bourgeois; nowhere in the whole world are they so brazen-faced and tyrannical as over there . . . Where the battle is fought by the bourgeoisie with such weapons, the decision arrives quickly . . ."

In his letter to Mrs. Wischnewetsky dated December 28, 1886, Engels again emphasized that the American Marxists should not *poch poch* the proletarian "Third Party" **from without, but revolutionize it from within.** He again uses unminced words in condemning the German sectarians in America and their dogma of the "role of the party" which in reality, then as now, renders impossible for the party to fulfill its role in the proletarian revolution by separating it from the masses. The remarks made by Engels in this passage on the dialectic-materialist conception of the role of theory are moreover the direct point of departure from which Lenin developed his doctrine of the importance of theory in the proletarian revolution:

"It is far more important that the movement should spread, proceed harmoniously. take root and EM-

BRACE as much as possible **THE WHOLE AMERICAN PROLETARIAT**, than that it should start and proceed from the beginning on theoretically perfectly correct lines. There is no better road to theoretical clearness of comprehension than to learn by one's own mistakes, 'durch Schaden klug werden.'* And for a whole large class, there is no other road, especially for a nation so eminently practical and so contemptuous of theory as the Americans. **THE GREAT THING IS TO GET THE WORKING CLASS TO MOVE AS A CLASS**; that once obtained, they will soon find the right direction. and all who resist. . . will be left in the cold with small sects of their own. Therefore I think also the **K. of L.** a most important factor in the movement **WHICH OUGHT NOT TO BE POOH-POOHED FROM WITHOUT BUT TO BE REVOLUTIONIZED FROM WITHIN**, and I consider that many of the Germans then have made a grievous mistake when they tried, in the face of a mighty and glorious movement not of their own creation, to make of their imported and not always understood theory a kind of *alleinseligmachendts*** dogma and to keep aloof from any movement, which did not accept that dogma. Our theory is not a dogma but the exposition of a process of evolution, and that process involves successive phases. To expect that the Americans will start with the full consciousness of the theory worked out in older industrial countries is to expect the impossible. What the Germans ought to do is to act up to their own theory—if they understand it, as we did in 1845

* 'Grow wise through injury to oneself.'

** Claiming the monopoly of all means of grace.

and 1848—to go in for any real general working class movement. ACCEPT ITS FAKTISCHEN*** STARTING POINT as such and work it gradually up to the theoretical level by pointing out how every mistake made, every reverse suffered, was a necessary consequence of mistaken theoretical orders in the original program: they ought, in the words of the Communist Manifesto: IN DER GEGENWART DER BEWEGUNG DIE ZUKUNFT DER BEWEGUNG REPRESENTIEREN.**** But above all give the movement time to consolidate, do not make THE INEVITABLE CONFUSION OF THE FIRST START worse confounded by forcing down people's throats things which, at present, they cannot properly understand but which they soon will learn. A MILLION OR TWO WORKINGMEN'S VOTES NEXT NOVEMBER FOR A BONAFIDE WORKINGMEN'S PARTY IS WORTH INFINITELY MORE AT PRESENT THAN A HUNDRED THOUSAND VOTES FOR A DOCTRINALLY PERFECT PLATFORM. The very first attempt—soon to be made if the movement progresses—to consolidate the moving masses on a national basis—will bring them all face to face, Georgites, K. of L., Trade Unionists, and all; . . . then will be the time for them to criticize the views of the others and thus, by showing up the inconsistencies of the various standpoints, to bring them gradually to understand their own actual position, the position made for them by the correlation of capital and wage labor. But anything that might de-

*** Actual.

**** Communist Manifesto: To represent the future of the movement in its present.

lay or prevent that NATIONAL CONSOLIDATION OF THE WORKINGMEN'S PARTY— on no matter what platform—I should consider a great mistake. . . .”

In another letter to Mrs. Wischnewetsky, Engels speaks of the necessity of first, and most important of all, “gaining the ear of the working class.” He then develops this idea as follows:

“I think all our practice has shown that it is possible to work along with the general movement of the working class AT EVERY ONE OF ITS STAGES WITHOUT GIVING UP OR HIDING OUR OWN DISTINCT POSITION AND EVEN ORGANIZATION, and I am afraid that if the German Americans choose a different line they will commit a great mistake.” (Letter of January 27, 1887.)

It should be noted that Engels wrote these lines just at the moment of the disgraceful behavior of the K. of L. towards the Chicago prisoners. H. George founded at that time in New York a weekly in which he disavowed the New York Socialists and refused to do anything in favor of the anarchists condemned in Chicago. Without hesitating a moment Engels supported Aveling, the son-in-law of Marx, who even in this situation bitterly fought the sectarian tactics of the National Executive of the Socialist Labor Party.

The viewpoint of Marx and Engels in the question of the American labor party is thus absolutely clear; they demanded of the American Marxists the formation of a national working-class party in America at any price, without regard to its program so long as the latter included the class

struggle, but with the complete maintenance of the political independence and the organization of the Marxist nucleus with the great mass party.

V.

The Role of the Marxist Nucleus Within the Working Class Party.

WE have already pointed out that Marx and Engels never wanted to give up the maintenance of a real Marxist party of the most class-conscious and progressive elements of the native and foreign-born in the working class within the great mass party. For thirty years, in their correspondence with the American Socialists, they rejected any endeavor to set up a mechanical distinction between the Marxist party and the labor party, as two opposites which exclude each other. The sectarians in the German S. L. P., who accused them of "liquidating the leading role of the Marxist party," were criticized unmercifully by them. More than that, year after year they pointed out through the results of the progressing labor movement in America that the leading role of the Marxist party can be best realized and can only be realized within the great revolutionary mass party. Only when the Marxist—or putting it in modern phraseology—the Bolshevik party fulfills this task within an extensive proletarian mass party—a labor party—can the historically conditioned backwardness of the American movement be overcome by the practical experience of the masses themselves, and can the

differences and antagonisms within the working class be settled. In his letter dated November 29, 1886, Engels formulates the task of the Marxist party, "to build up within this still wholly plastic mass a nucleus of persons who understand the movement and its goals "and which later takes over the real leadership of the movement, as follows:

"But just now it is doubly necessary for us to have a few people³ who are thoroughly versed in **THEORY** and well-tested **TACTICS** . . . for the Americans are for good historical reasons far behind in all theoretical questions, have taken over no mediaeval institutions from Europe, but have taken masses of mediaeval tradition, English common (feudal) law, superstition, spiritualism, in short, all the nonsense which did not directly hurt business and which is now very useful for stupefying the masses. And if **THEORETICALLY CLEAR FIGHTERS** are available, who can predict for them the consequence of their own mistakes, who can make clear for them that every movement, which does not incessantly fix its eye upon the destruction of the wage system as its final goal must go astray and fail, many mistakes can be avoided and the process can be considerably shortened." (Letter to Sorge dated November 29, 1886).

In the letter of January 27, 1887 (quoted before), Engels outlined the fundamental tactical policy of the American Marxists: working along with the general movement of the working class at every one of its stages without giving up or hiding their own political position and organization.

In his letter to Sorge dated February 8, 1890, he denotes as their task "to **take over** through their superior theoretical insight and experience the leading role" in the masses, as events themselves drive the American proletariat forward. And he adds, in order to reassure Sorge, who fears for the preservation of the past results of the pure Marxist party:

"You will then see that your work of years has not been in vain."

Although Engels time and again points out that the working class can only learn from its own experiences, he is far from becoming a worshipper of spontaneity. In the same letter, he tells the American Marxists in connection with the successes of the miners' movement in 1890 in Germany:

"Facts must hammer it into people's heads and then things move faster, **MOST RAPIDLY OF COURSE, WHERE THERE ALREADY IS AN ORGANIZED AND THEORETICALLY TRAINED SECTION OF THE PROLETARIAT. . .**"

Finally, taking up the specific conditions in America, he foresees that in the great labor party, principally composed of native workers, "the foreign element in the nation will make its influence felt through its greater mobility." This foreign element, however, comprised and comprises of necessity in America the majority of the pure Marxist party. It is just the Communists' confining themselves to the ranks of their own supporters and those who are already in whole-

hearted sympathy with them, it is just the renunciation of the formation of a mass party which leads to the spontaneity theory, to "Khvostism," to the hindrance of the Communist task of taking the leadership of the entire class in the revolution.

VI.

The Role of the Farmers.

IN his letter of July 25, 1877, Marx predicted the role of the farmers, who are being revolutionized in consequence of the agrarian crisis and their expropriation through big business, as that of the allies of the working class. He designated the revolutionization of the farmers as well as the beginning of the Negroes' awakening "to favorable circumstances" for the "constitution of an earnest workers' party." On the other hand Engels proves in his letter to Sorge dated January 6, 1892, that the American farmers as a class have not the strength for the formation of an independent political party. Every endeavor to form an independent farmers' party in America must of necessity make this party the plaything of petty bourgeois political speculators and consequently an appendage of the two capitalist parties:

"The small farmers and petty bourgeoisie will scarcely ever be able to form a strong party. They are composed of too rapidly changing elements—the farmer is often a wandering farmer, who cultivates two, three or four farms in different states and territories one after the other; immigration and bankruptcy promote the change of personnel in both; eco-

conomic dependence upon creditors also hinders independence—but to make up for that they are excellent material for politicians, who speculate with their dissatisfaction in order to sell them later to one of the big parties.”

The oppression of farmers by immigration has meanwhile disappeared, but to compensate for that, bankruptcies have multiplied. Under any circumstances, the fact remains that the working farmers in America can never defend their class interests against finance capital through an independent party. They can only fight the bourgeoisie and its big parties under the leadership of a mass party of the American workers, which in turn is led by a Marxist party.

VII.

The Modern Development of America.

IN the third preface to the Communist Manifesto, written in 1883, Engels pointed out the change in America's position in the capitalist world. Marx and Engels often spoke in the last few years of their lives of the predominating participation of the United States in the fight for breaking British monopoly. In one passage of his correspondence, which has received altogether too little attention, Engels speaks directly of the possibility of an **American monopoly**, of the coming domination of American capitalism over the whole world. In his letter to Sorge dated January 7, 1888, he speaks of the danger of the European war which Bismarck threatened to bring

about. "Ten to fifteen million combatants" would take part. "There would be devastation, similar to that in the Thirty Years' War."

"If the war would be fought to a finish without inner movements, a state of exhaustion would result such as Europe has not experienced for two hundred years. AMERICAN INDUSTRY WOULD THEN WIN ALL ALONG THE LINE AND WOULD SET US ALL BEFORE THE ALTERNATIVE: either a relapse to pure agriculture for our own needs (American grain forbids any other kind), or—SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION."

Engels thus foresees the imperialist World War and the resulting world monopoly of American imperialism. His prediction that under these circumstances Europe would relapse into pure agriculture has not been literally fulfilled. Its place has been taken by the specifically imperialist method of pillaging and subjugating old European industrial countries through the loans and investments of the Dawes system. The historical perspective sketched by Engels, however, remains unchanged; the monopoly of American finance capital is not to be compared with the former monopoly of British industrial capital. It cannot maintain itself for a long period of time; it is no monopoly in the true sense of the word. It must break down in consequence of the unequal development of the various imperialist powers, of the competition of British finance capital, and principally as a result of the rebellion of the working masses in Europe and the colonies. In the words of Engels, it sets "us all before the alterna-

tive" of the proletarian revolution.

Even more clearly than the development of American imperialism did Engels foresee the future course of the American labor movement. He knew that the progress of capitalist production must unavoidably lead to the revolutionization of the American labor movement:

"As for those nice Americans who think their country exempt from the consequences of fully expanded capitalist production, they seem to live in blissful ignorance of the fact that sundry states, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, etc., have such an institution as a Labor Bureau from the reports of which they might learn something to the contrary."

Engels sees the difficulties in the path of the development of the revolutionary labor movement. After the defeat of the Knights of Labor movement, he writes to Sorge on October 24, 1891, as follows:

"I readily believe that the movement is again at a low ebb. With you everything happens with great ups and downs. But each up wins definite terrain and thus one does go forward. Thus for instance, the tremendous wave of the Knights of Labor and the strike movement from 1886 to 1888, despite all defeats, did bring us forward. There is an altogether different spirit in the masses than before. The next time even more ground will be won. But with all that, the standard of living of the native American working man is considerably higher than that of the British and that alone is sufficient to allot him a back seat for some

time to come; added to that. immigration, competition, and other things. When the point is reached, things will move forward over there with colossal rapidity and energy, but until then, some time may have to elapse."

The chief obstacles, the high standard of living of the majority of native workers and the competition caused by the incessant stream of immigrants have been eliminated to a certain degree. The World War brought with it the increase of wages of all unskilled workers in America. The economic crisis after the war led to radical reductions of wages not only among the foreign-born, but in even greater degree among the native workers. The competition of foreign workers has been considerably reduced by the restrictions upon immigration.

Another obstacle, the diversion of the workers from the class struggles by the hope of obtaining land, has for the most part been removed by the disappearance of the possibilities of free settlement. There exists "a generation of native-born workers who have nothing more to expect from speculation:"

"Land is the basis of speculation, and the American possibility of and craze for speculation is the chief influence of the bourgeoisie. Only when we have a generation of native-born workers who have nothing more to expect from speculation, will we have firm ground under our feet in America." (Letter to Sorge dated January 6, 1892.)

Engels time and again emphasized that the

revolutionization of the American labor movement, which he foresaw as unavoidable, would begin under tremendous difficulties and would experience incessant ups and downs, but would then develop "with colossal rapidity and energy." His letter to Schlueter dated March 30, 1892, concludes with the sentence:

"When the Americans once begin, they will do so with an energy and virulence, in comparison with which we in Europe will be children."

VIII.

The International Role of the American Labor Movement.

IN his letter to Mrs. Wischnewetzky dated June 3, 1886, Engels writes:

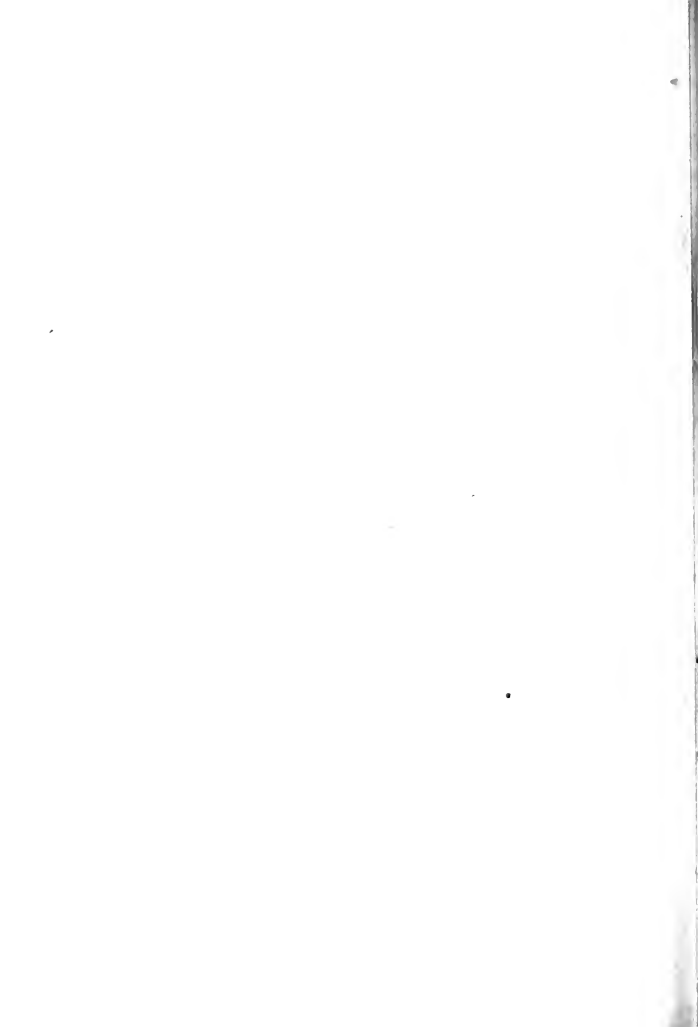
". . . one thing is certain: the American working class is moving, and no mistake. And after a few false starts, they will get into the right track soon enough. This appearance of the Americans upon the scene I consider **ONE OF THE GREATEST EVENTS OF THE YEAR.**

"What the breakdown of **RUSSIAN CZARISM** would be for the great military monarchs of Europe—**THE SNAPPING OF THEIR MAINSTAY**—that is for the bourgeoisie of the whole world **THE BREAKING OUT OF CLASS WAR** in America. For America after all was the ideal of all the bourgeoisie: a country rich, vast, expanding with purely bourgeois institutions unleavened by feudal remnants or monarchical traditions and without a permanent and hereditary proletariat. Here

every one could become, if not a capitalist, at all events an independent man, producing or trading, with his own means, for his own account. And because there were not, as yet, classes with opposing interests, our—and your—bourgeois thought that America stood above class antagonisms and struggles. The delusion has now broken down, the last bourgeois Paradise on earth is fast changing into a Purgatorio, and can only be prevented from becoming like Europe, an Inferno, by the go-ahead pace at which the development of the newly-fledged proletariat of America will take place.”

This analysis of the international significance of the proletarian class struggle in America holds true even today, stronger and more vital than ever. There already exists in America a “standing hereditary proletariat.” The illusion of the bourgeois paradise has already been dissipated. The outbreak of the class war in America, its leadership by a revolutionary mass party, at the head of which the American Communists will place themselves, and the inception of revolutionary mass struggles in America, would in reality signify the “snapping of the mainstay” of imperialism throughout the world.

THE END.





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