
The Socialist Party Furnishes Its “Insurgents”

by Bertram D. Wolfe

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The disintegration going on inside the Socialist Party and the determination of the *Forward's* crowd to rule what is left of the party with an iron hand are reflected in the nominations just made public by the New York Socialists for the present electoral campaign.

For some time there has been growing discontent manifested within the ranks of New York Socialists, especially among the younger elements, against the methods used by the *Forward's* crowd in fighting the Communists, in opposing the united front proposals of the Workers (Communist) Party, in splitting unions and other labor organizations and expelling progressive and left wing elements, in using gangsterism — in short, in all the methods employed by the old socialist leadership to ruin the labor movement that they can no longer rule.

Forward Line.

The *Forward* has degenerated very rapidly as its working class leaders diminished and it made an ever greater bid for leaders among New York's petty bourgeoisie. Abandoning its active opposition to Zionism, it now plays up Palestine and the Zionist movement in its columns. Its obvious lies against Soviet Russia, in which it runs such headlines as “Zinoviev Arrested” or “Mass Uprisings of the Unemployed All Over Russia,” at the same time that the capitalist press is admitting the stability, the power, and the growth of the workers' rule in the Soviet Union, these obvious lies have amazed those few young elements who have entered into the Socialist Party since the world

war and do not know of its betrayal during that period and cannot understand how a supposed workers' paper can lie so viciously and support such anti-proletarian causes. The gangster tactics of Beckerman in the Amalgamated [Clothing Workers], the attempt at betrayal of the Furriers' strike by Shachtman and the Socialist Party leaders in the Furriers' Union, the long attempt at union wrecking which reached its height in the attempted expulsion of Locals 2, 9, and 22 from the ILGWU — all these have aroused indignation and bewilderment in the few honest elements in the Socialist Party.

Even Norman Thomas.

Even a small section of the leadership, such men as Norman Thomas, have been criticizing these policies of lying, disruption, expulsion, and gangsterism, because they are causing a further loss of membership and a further disintegration in the Socialist Party.

All this vague and incoherent opposition, ranging from the Young People's Socialist League "who cannot understand" why united fronts so urgently required by the working class should be sabotaged and rejected by the SP leadership, to men like Norman Thomas who believe that such tactics as the *Forward's* trade union bureaucracy are employing are not the best methods of fighting Communism and the Communists, combine together to form a feeble and faintly critical opposition in the SP.

Shows Its Claws.

Now the *Forward's* crowd is showing its claws. Even such a feeble opposition that limits itself to secret protests and questionings will not be tolerated inside the moribund SP. Norman Thomas, who for the last few years has always been made the standard bearer and head of the ticket in each political campaign, this year was "punished" for his refusal to accept unquestioningly the tactics of the *Forward's* crowd by being relegated to the nomination for the State Senate in the 14th Senatorial District.

The post of State Senator in the state of New York even in the old capitalist parties and in districts where elections are assured, is re-

garded as the post for “candidate of obscurity.” To put Norman Thomas, who has headed the state ticket on a county ticket is equivalent to offering Governor Smith the Democratic nomination for State Senator from the 14th District.

Why He Was Dumped.

One does not have to go very far to find out why Norman Thomas was dumped into that dead district. In *The New Leader* of Saturday, September 11 [1926], in the very next column to the one in which the nominations are announced, we find an article by Norman Thomas in which he again covertly attacks the practices of the Socialist bureaucrats in the needle trades unions. Of course, he does not mention the Socialist leaders but merely talks in the abstract of leaders in general, but nay New York needle trades worker knows what he means and his article ends, “For the present, you can make your own application of these remarks.” A few lines will suffice to show the character of this little editorial by Norman Thomas:

There is a school of trade union organizers and leaders, [writes Norman Thomas], who think in terms of power, and, if one may judge by their words and deeds, nothing but power. They trust to strong-arm methods without even waiting to try persuasion. In their dealings with their own union too often they emulate the ruthlessness of the bosses.... I could name more than one union which today would be stronger and not weaker if its leaders had not been so “practical,” so quick to appeal to power rather than to the sense of justice. Unions that cannot get an honest count of their own votes will never reform politics, and many a union leader who talks about “democracy” in his fight against Communism, by his own dictatorial methods does more to help Communism than the Communists. For the present you can make your own application of these remarks.

A Strange Paper.

The New Leader is a strange paper. In one column Norman Thomas, who apparently gets complete charge of that column in order to “keep him quiet,” writes with fairness as fairness is understood by a Socialist tinged with liberalism and pacifism and prejudiced against

the uncompromising forms of struggle which the Communists advocate, and in the rest of the paper every conceivable sort of lie and slander is written about these same Communists.

Vicious Attacks.

Thus on the same front page we find an attack upon the Anti-Fascisti Alliance, which is all inclusive of the Italian workers — so all inclusive that even William Green found it necessary to address them — stating that the Anti-Fascisti Alliance “was largely attended by Communist delegates, representing paper organizations.” On the next page is a vicious attack upon all united front organizations including Communists in their leadership. The attack reads in part: “In case of a strike where Communists obtain the leadership and then appeal for a united front as well as for funds, you are advised not to become a part of this united front or to contribute any funds.”

What would have happened if the rank and file of the Socialists had followed such advice in the Passaic strike? Norman Thomas himself formed part of united fronts in connection with the Passaic strike.

A few weeks previous *The New Leader* went so far in its imitation of the lies and slanders printed by *The Jewish Daily Forward* that it even reprinted a faked speech in which Stalin was supposed to have called Zinoviev an idiot and declared that the Communist International knows nothing about America.

Reflect Disintegration.

Thus *The New Leader*, like the Socialist ticket that it publishes, are reflections of further disintegration going on inside the Socialist Party. Both the ticket and the paper still have to find a little corner for Norman Thomas, but formerly Thomas used to have articles in all parts of the paper and formerly he used to head the Socialist Party ticket. Now he is stuck somewhere on the tail of the ticket and limited to his column in the paper.

The *Forward's* crowd is determined to run things with an iron hand and it is questionable how long they will permit even the innocent protests of Norman Thomas and how long they will still find any

place for him at all in the ballot for him and in their paper. The only reason they tolerate him at all is because they know that his mild protest acts as a break upon the idealistic elements among the YPSLs, who are disgusted with the *Forward's* crowd and its tactics but do not know what to do about it and have not enough initiative to make their own fight and have to look to a man like Norman Thomas for such leadership as he can give.

A Fig Leaf.

In short, consciously or unconsciously, he is playing the none-too-pleasant role of an idealistic fig leaf for the none-too-idealistic practices of the *Forward's* crowd.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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