

INTRODUCTION

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN SOCIALISM IN THE UNITED STATES

IN wading through the history of modern socialism in the United States, we light occasionally on what seems to be a connecting-link between that movement and its earlier utopian phases.

Thus the Icarian communities maintained close relations with the Working Men's League of Weitling in the fifties of the last century; later they took an active part in the works of the International, and their magazines, *La Revue Icarienne* and *La Jeune Icarie*, were listed as official organs of the Socialist Labor Party as late as 1879.

Alcander Longley, who was prominently connected with almost every phase of the utopian movements, reappears in about 1880 as a member of "Section St. Louis" of the Socialist Labor Party, vigorously advocating the principles of that party in his *Communist*. Many Fourierists manifested a sympathetic interest in the development of the later-day socialism, and at least one Brook Farmer, Dr. J. Homer Doucet, of Philadelphia, is still actively connected with the socialist movement.

But these instances must be regarded in the light of exceptions to the general rule, and, on the whole, it is safe to say that the early utopian theories and communistic colonies had but little influence on the formation of the modern socialist movement in the United States.

The two movements are entirely different in nature and origin.

Utopian socialism was built on purely moral conceptions, and derived its inspiration from the teachings of Christ or other codes of ethics; its existence was equally justified in the eighteenth century as in the nineteenth, and in this country as on the old continent.

Modern socialism, on the other hand, is primarily economic in character, and can not take root in any country before its social and industrial conditions have made it ripe for the movement.

The present socialist movement depends for its support upon the existence of a large class of working men divorced from the soil and other means of production, and permanently reduced to the ranks of wage labor. It also requires a system of industry developed to a point where it becomes onerous upon the working men, breeds dissatisfaction, and impels them to organized resistance. In other words, the movement presupposes the existence of the modern factory system in a high state of development, and all the social contrasts and economic struggles incidental to such a system.

And these conditions did not exist in the United States during the first half of the last century. America has long held an exceptional position among the nations of the earth. At a time when the countries of Europe had almost exhausted every square foot of ground and all of their natural resources, the western hemisphere had boundless stretches of fertile soil waiting for the first comer to occupy. Agriculture was a comparatively easy and lucrative occupation, and the greater part of the American population consisted of independent farmers, at a time when manufacture and industry were the dominant factors in Europe. The abundance of land, in drawing the greater part of able-bodied men to the fields and pastures, furthermore left the supply of labor for the young industries far below the demand, and kept up an exceptionally high standard of wages.

Wage labor was, under these circumstances, altogether more of a temporary condition than a permanent institution:

as a rule it took the working man but a short time to save up sufficient money to settle on a farm, or to purchase the very simple and inexpensive tools of his trade, and to establish himself in business on his own account.

Nor were the blessings of American life confined to mere economic advantages. The great struggles and triumphs of the Revolutionary War were still fresh in the memory of the nation; the inspiring doctrines of the Declaration of Independence still rang in the ears of the Americans; the "inalienable right" of men to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness was a living truth to them; they were proud of their political sovereignty, of their freedom of conscience, and of their liberty of speech and press. The young republic was prosperous, its future was brilliant; it had no political privileges and hardly any economic classes, and it was but natural that it should have developed an unusual national optimism and complacency which caused it to frown upon any movement based on dissatisfaction with the existing order of things.

But gradually a change was worked in the economic conditions of the country. The unprecedented increase of population diminished the area of public lands from year to year; the more fertile soil was rapidly occupied, and what remained was mostly forest or barren country. Land became an object of commerce and speculation, steadily rising in price and growing more and more inaccessible to the poor, who were, in consequence, compelled to turn from agriculture to industry. The foundation for a permanent class of wage-workers was thus laid.

At the same time, and as part of the same movement, modern industry made its appearance in the United States, and soon assumed marvelous dimensions. The inexhaustible resources of raw material of the country, and the enterprise and ingenuity of its inhabitants, soon conquered for it a front rank among the industrial nations. Commercial cities, factory towns, and mining-camps sprang up in all parts of the

continent; railroad lines and telegraph wires covered it with a veritable network, and from a peaceful and contented agricultural community, the United States turned into a puffing, hustling, and noisy workshop.

The industrial revolution brought in its wake a very radical change in the social relations of men. A new era was introduced in the national life of America—the era of multimillionaires and money-kings, of unprecedented luxury and splendor, but also the era of abject poverty and dire distress.

Overt struggles between capital and labor, in the shape of strikes, lockouts, and boycotts, became more and more frequent, and were oftentimes attended by acts of violence.

At the same time, the flow of working men to the industrial centers caused a congestion of population in some cases comparable only to that of China; slums and tenement-houses became as much a feature of our principal cities as their magnificent avenues and mansions.

In short, the United States, so recently the ideal republic of equal and independent citizens, became the theater of the most embittered class wars and most glaring social contrasts ever witnessed in modern times.

And all these astounding social and economic changes were accomplished with incredible rapidity. In 1850 the population of the United States was but little over 23,000,000; half a century later it rose to over 75,000,000. In 1850 the wealth of the country amounted to little over \$7,000,000,000, and was pretty evenly distributed among the population; in 1890 the "national wealth" exceeded \$65,000,000,000, and more than one-half of it was concentrated in the hands of but 40,000 families, or one-third of one per cent. of the population. In 1850 fifty-five per cent. of the wealth of the United States consisted of farms; in 1890 the farms made up less than twenty-four per cent. of the wealth of the country. In 1860 the entire capital invested in industries in the United States was little over \$1,000,000,-

000; in the space of the following thirty years it had increased more than sixfold.

In 1870 the supply of labor was too inadequate for the demand; three decades later there was a standing army of over 1,000,000 idle working men. In 1870 strikes and lockouts were hardly known in America; between 1881 and 1894 the country witnessed over 14,000 contests between capital and labor, in which about 4,000,000 of working men participated.

The process of development sketched in the preceding pages thus prepared the ground for the socialist movement of the modern type, but a variety of circumstances rooted in the economic and political conditions and historical features peculiar to this country operated to retard the progress of the movement.

In the first place, the American working men still enjoyed some actual advantages over their brethren on the other side of the ocean. The marvelous variety of industries and the constant opening of new fields of enterprise made the United States a comparatively favorable market for labor, and, notwithstanding the temporary industrial depressions, the wages of American working men were, on the whole, better, and their standard of life higher, than those of the European wage-workers. In the next place, there was a great difference between the disposition and mental attitude of the working classes of America and Europe, which is to be accounted for by the difference of their origin and history.

European industry was developed from the small manufacture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; the master of the workshop of old grew into the capitalist of today, and the apprentice and helper into the modern wage-worker. The process was a slow and gradual one, and both classes had ample time to crystallize. ~~The European working men had several generations behind them; they had their class traditions and sentiments; they were "class conscious."~~

Not so with the American working men. Their existence

~~as a class was of too recent date to have developed decided class feelings in them; they had yet before them the example of too many men who before their very eyes rose from the ranks of labor to the highest pinnacles of wealth and power; they were still inclined to consider wage labor as a mere transitory condition.~~

Another check on the progress of the socialist movement in the United States is to be found in the political institutions of the country: the working classes of the European countries were, as a rule, deprived of some political rights enjoyed by other classes of citizens, and the common struggle for the acquisition of those rights was frequently the first cause to draw them together into a distinct political union. *Universal Suffrage* was the battle-cry of the German working men when they gathered around Lassalle in the early sixties, and founded the nucleus of the now powerful Social Democratic Party: "The repeal of all laws curtailing individual liberty, freedom of the press, education, coalition, and association," was one of the first demands of the French socialists upon the revival of the movement a short time after the fall of the Commune; and similarly the first struggles of the Austrian and Italian socialists were for universal suffrage, for freedom of meeting and association, and for the right of coalition of the working class.

In the United States, however, the working men enjoyed full political equality at all times, and thus had one less motive to organize politically on a class basis.

Furthermore, the periodical appearance of radical reform parties on the political arena of the country often had the effect of side-tracking the incipient socialist movement into different channels.

All these and many more obstacles of minor import contributed to make the progress of socialism in this country a much slower and more laborious process than in most countries of Europe.

The first beginnings of modern socialism appeared on this

continent before the close of the first half of the last century, but it took another half a century before the movement could be said to have become acclimatized on American soil.

The history of this period of the socialist movement in the United States may, for the sake of convenience, altho somewhat arbitrarily, be divided into the following four periods:

1. **THE ANTE-BELLUM PERIOD**, from about 1848 to the beginning of the civil war. The movement of that period was confined almost exclusively to German immigrants, principally of the working class. It was quite insignificant in breadth as well as in depth, and was almost entirely swept away by the excitement of the civil war.

2. **THE PERIOD OF ORGANIZATION**, covering the decade between 1867 and 1877, and marked by a succession of socialist societies and parties, first on a local then on a national scale, culminating finally in the formation of the Socialist Labor Party.

3. **THE PERIOD OF THE SOCIALIST LABOR PARTY**, extending over twenty years, and marked by a series of internal and external struggles over the question of the policy and tactics of the movement.

4. **PRESENT-DAY SOCIALISM**, which embraces the period of the last few years, and is marked by the acclimatization of the movement and the advent of the **SOCIALIST PARTY**.