

CHAPTER VII.

SOCIALIST MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES.

FOR many years American statesmen and social philosophers watched the growing tide of Socialism on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean with serene detachment. "Socialism," they diagnosed, "is a specific European product. It will never take root in American soil." And for a long time the belief seemed to be justified.

The early forms of European Socialism, the humanitarian and romantic movements of the beginning and the middle of the nineteenth century had found a lively echo in the United States. Most of Robert Owen's practical experiments in communism were tried out on American soil, and his primitive doctrines of Utopian Socialism gained large currency in this country during the period between 1825 and 1830.

The "Icarian" communities of Étienne Cabet, though originating in France, lived through their adventurous and pathetic history in Texas, Illinois and Missouri. The Fourierist creed had such brilliant sponsors in the United States as Albert Brisbane,

Horace Greeley, Charles A. Dana, Parke Godwin, William Channing and John S. Dwight. It produced the famous Brook Farm and the North American Phalanx besides about forty less known social experiments in different parts of the country.

But these movements left no lasting impression on the life and thought of the American people. They died out before the era of large-scale capitalistic production.

Socialism as a political working-class movement originated in Europe towards the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and developed marvelous strength and vitality during the following two decades. But in the United States it had little more than a nominal existence during that period.

The vast majority of its adherents were foreign-born workingmen, principally Germans, who had brought their social philosophy with them from their native lands, and were making heroic endeavors to acclimatize the movement in the country of their adoption. Their efforts were practically barren of results. The United States lacked the most essential requirements for the development of a Socialist movement of the modern type.

Socialism presupposes an advanced and concentrated state of industry, a powerful class of capitalists dominating the economic and political destinies of the country, a large army of industrial wage-workers in a precarious condition of existence, and a clear-cut and conscious economic conflict between these classes.

In the United States these conditions developed only within very recent years. A generation ago agriculture was still the main industry of the country, while manufacture was conducted on a comparatively small scale. The general prosperity following the Civil War and the remainder of "free land" in the West operated to retard the class struggles in America and to create a condition of relative industrial peace.

But during the latter half of the nineteenth century American industries awoke with a start and with the rapidity characteristic of all new-world progress they soon outdistanced their European rivals. Enormous factories and mills arose all through the East and Middle West, and the United States increased its manufactured products from about one billion dollars to more than thirteen billions per year, thus surging from fourth to first rank among the manufacturing nations of the world. During the same period the different sections of the country were brought into organic touch with each other and with the rest of the world by a veritable network of railroads and a wonderful system of steamboats. The number of railroad miles in operation rose from about 9,000 in 1850 to almost 200,000 in 1900. The improvement in the number, size and speed of transatlantic steamboats kept pace with that of the railroads. The means of communication grew as rapidly as those of transportation. The postoffices in the country jumped from about 28,000 in 1860 to more than 75,000 in

1900, and the annual telegraph messages increased from 5,000,000 to 80,000,000 during the same period.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the United States had become a distinctly industrial and "capitalistic" country. Over 40 per cent. of its inhabitants were engaged in manufacture, trade and transportation, and agriculture receded to second place. One-third of all the people had congregated in large cities as against one-eighth in 1850. Corporations became the dominant factors in industry and finally evolved the highest form of capitalist organization—the trusts. Large fortunes were quickly made and a generation of millionaires and multi-millionaires was born. Towards the middle of the last century America could boast of only fifty millionaires with an aggregate fortune of about eighty million dollars. At the close of the century the number of American millionaires of all degrees exceeded twenty thousand, their total wealth mounted to thirty billion dollars and represented almost a full half of the "national" wealth of the country.

The rapid growth and expansion of capitalism naturally produced its inseparable counterparts—mass-poverty, unemployment, child labor, class struggles, social unrest and general discontent. By the end of the century about 6,500,000 persons were regularly without work at some time during the year, and the standing army of jobless workers was considerably over one million. At the same time the number of



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working children, 10 to 15 years of age, exceeded 1,750,000, and that of working women over the age of 15 years was about 5,000,000. The closing twenty years of the nineteenth century witnessed about 24,000 recorded labor struggles, involving a total of almost 7,000,000 workers.

Thus the modern industrial conditions of the old world were transplanted and intensified in the United States, and with them the fatal legacy of economic problems and evils. Here as there the baneful system inevitably called forth organized resistance on the part of its victims. The movement of resistance was represented on the economic field by the labor unions. In the political field it was bound to find expression in Socialism, just as the similar conditions in the countries of Europe had found such expression. Socialism is the legitimate child of capitalism, and at a certain stage of its development the latter cannot help begetting the former.

The dawn of the present century found a considerable Socialist and semi-Socialist sentiment among several sections of the American population, and also the rudiments of a Socialist political organization. The latter were represented by two separate factions of the "Socialist Labor Party," the old-time organization of the Socialists in America, the "Social Democratic Party," which had then been recently organized, and several minor Socialist organizations. Dissensions and antagonism, so characteristic of the formative stages of the Socialist movement in every

country, were the principal feature of the American Socialist organizations until the middle of 1901, when all organizations with one exception (that of the more irreconcilable faction of the Socialist Labor Party) united. The formal unification was accomplished at a joint national convention, which was held in Indianapolis on July 29, 1901, and which created the present *Socialist Party*.

The growth of the Socialist Party during the twelve years of its existence is best demonstrated by its political gains.

In the Presidential election of 1900, and before the formal unification of the party, its constituent organizations polled a vote of about 100,000. This vote was materially increased in the spring and fall elections of the following year, but owing to the local character of these elections the vote was never fully reported.

In the Congressional elections of 1902, however, the Socialist vote, to the surprise of all, reached very closely the quarter-million mark.

In the Presidential campaign of 1904, the political conditions of the country were exceedingly favorable for Socialism. The two great political parties both made their campaign on conservative platforms, and the People's Party had been discredited by its former alliance with the Democrats, and disorganized and divided in its ranks. The Socialist Party, therefore, was practically the only representative of radicalism in politics, and in a position to muster its full legiti-

mate force. The party was thoroughly alive to its opportunities, and carried on a campaign which for intensity, extension and effectiveness excelled all previous efforts of the Socialists in this country. The vote polled for the party's candidate for President, Eugene V. Debs, was 402,321.

In the elections of 1906, the vote of the Socialist Party was reduced to 330,158 (the figures are based on the highest vote in every state), and the local elections of 1907 showed no material change in the Socialist vote.

The political situation of 1908 was inauspicious for the Socialist Party. All political parties made special bids for the "labor vote" and were profuse in their promises of radical social reforms. The Republican Party was pledged to continue the "radical policies" of President Roosevelt. The Democratic Party revived the slogans of the old-time middle-class reforms and reinstated the prophet of that brand of politics, William J. Bryan, in the leadership of the party. The "radicalism" of the old parties was far exceeded by that of Mr. Hearst's newly formed Independence Party.

The vote cast for the Socialist ticket in that election was 421,520, a slight increase over that of 1904, the party's former high record.

The succeeding two years were years of steady activity and quiet harvest for the Socialist movement in the United States. The economic condition of the country following the crisis of 1907 and the failure

of the numerous reform movements of the middle classes, had created an atmosphere exceptionally favorable to the growth of Socialist sentiment, and the organized Socialists were not slow to take advantage of it. Their propaganda grew in intensity and dimension; their organization was greatly strengthened, and they made new converts among all classes of the population.

In the spring of 1910 the Socialist Party gained its first notable political victory in the United States by carrying the City of Milwaukee, the twelfth largest city in the country.

In the following general Congressional elections which took place in November of the same year, the Socialist Party increased its vote by about 40 per cent., passing the 600,000 mark. In these elections also the party for the first time in the history of the United States captured a seat in the House of Representatives. Mr. Victor L. Berger was elected as the Socialist representative to Congress from the Fifth District of Wisconsin.

Nor did the political tide of Socialism abate in the local elections of 1911. In that year the Socialists carried eighteen cities and towns, among them the large industrial city of Schenectady in the State of New York; New Castle in Pennsylvania; eight towns in Ohio; five in Utah, and one in Minnesota. Berkeley, California; Butte, Montana; Flint, Michigan, and several other towns had been carried for Socialism in the spring of the same year.

In the Presidential elections of 1912 the political strength of American Socialism was subjected to a most severe test. For the first time in the history of American politics the voters were confronted by a party similar in type to the "liberal" or "radical" parties of the European bourgeoisie. The National Progressive Party made its campaign on a platform of broad social and political reform. It purloined a large number of minor planks from the Socialist program and even adopted many time-honored Socialist watch-words and slogans. The new party was organized and led by Theodore Roosevelt, the most popular man in the country and probably its most skilled politician, and his picturesque fight as well as the great prestige of his recent high office, could not fail to commend his party to the radicals and reformers of the country and to large masses of the workers. It offered the logical outlet to the proverbial vote of "discontent and protest."

Under these conditions the vote of the Socialist Party was from the outset limited to thoroughgoing Socialists.

It was therefore all the more significant, when it was found that the vote cast for Eugene V. Debs on November 5, 1912, was in the neighborhood of 900,000. The Socialist Party had doubled its vote of the preceding Presidential election under the most adverse circumstances, and had proved itself an established factor in American politics.

At the present time the Socialists control between

fifty and sixty American cities or towns and have more than one thousand elected representatives in various public offices, including twenty representatives in the legislatures of eight states.

But the progress of the Socialist movement in the United States can by no means be measured by its political strength and achievements alone. The Socialist Party was organized with a membership of less than ten thousand. Towards the end of 1904 the party consisted of about 1,500 local sub-divisions with a total of about 25,000 enrolled and dues-paying members. Within the period of the following eight years the number of local organizations has risen to about 5,000, with a combined membership of approximately 120,000.

Another indication of the increasing importance of the movement in the United States is the growth of the Socialist press. In 1904 the Socialist Party was supported by about forty publications in different languages. Since then the number of strictly Socialist publications has increased to more than three hundred. The greater part of these are periodicals in the English language, five are daily newspapers, ten are monthly magazines and the rest are weeklies. Socialist periodicals are printed in German, Finnish, Slavonic, Jewish, Polish, Bohemian, Lettish, French, Italian, Danish, Hungarian, Lithuanian, Russian, Swedish, Norwegian and Croatian. The first important daily English newspaper of the Socialist Party was launched in Chicago in the fall of 1906, under

the name of *Chicago Daily Socialist*, and it was followed by the establishment of the *New York Daily Call* in New York, in May, 1908. The *Appeal to Reason*, a weekly paper, has a circulation of about half a million copies, while the *Jewish Daily Forward* sells more than 130,000 copies per day. Among the monthly Socialist magazines, one, *The Progressive Woman*, is devoted primarily to the task of carrying the gospel of Socialism to women, and *The Young Socialist* aims at educating the youth in the philosophy of Socialism. This press labors under great material difficulties, but is making steady progress.

Besides the Socialist Party there is in the United States another Socialist political organization—the Socialist Labor Party. This party represents the remainder of the irreconcilable faction of the former party of the same name. Its membership is small, and its influence is slight. Still it publishes a daily paper in English and a few weekly papers in other languages. In the last general election it united about 29,000 votes on its candidate for President.

The Socialist movement in the United States has also of late made substantial progress among the organized workers of the country. Within the last few years many American trade-unions have demonstrated a lively interest in the subject of Socialism, and have on numerous occasions declared themselves unreservedly as favoring the Socialist program, or at least its most substantial points and planks. In 1907,

sixteen national organizations of workingmen, representing a total membership of 330,800, had thus endorsed the Socialist program, and in 1909 the United Mine Workers of America, one of the strongest organizations within the American Federation of Labor, at its national convention declared itself in favor of the cardinal aim of Socialism, the socialization of all material instruments of production.

And the industrial workers are not the only class among whom Socialism has made gains of late. The movement has made deep inroads among American farmers. In the national Socialist convention of 1904, the farmers made their first appearance with five delegates, and in the conventions of 1908, 1910 and 1912 a very substantial proportion of the delegates consisted of active and typical farmers. In the late general elections several purely agricultural states polled heavier Socialist votes than some of the states noted for factory industries.

And even the so-called intellectual classes of American society, the professionals and middle-class business men, are gradually drawn into the expanding circle of the Socialist movement. The American schools and colleges, as well as the press and churches, are honeycombed with Socialists or Socialist sympathizers. In the fall of 1905, several well-known radicals issued a call for the organization of a society "for the purpose of promoting an intelligent interest in Socialism among college men and women, graduate and undergraduate, through the formation

of study clubs in the colleges and universities, and the encouraging of all legitimate endeavors to awaken an interest in Socialism among the educated men and women of the country." On September 12, 1905, a number of people met in the city of New York in response to the call and organized the "Intercollegiate Socialist Society." During the short period of its existence, the society has distributed a large quantity of Socialist literature among college students and teachers, and its members have delivered a number of lectures on Socialism before college students. Socialist "study chapters" connected with the Intercollegiate Socialist Society have been organized in about fifty universities and colleges.

The Socialist movement has become fully acclimatized on American soil. According to a recent census, over 71 per cent. of the members of the Socialist Party are native citizens of the United States. The Socialist movement is to-day at least as much "American" as any other social or political movement in the country.

And still American Socialism is only in the making. All indications point to a steady development and large growth of the movement within the immediate future.

The industries of the country are rapidly concentrating in the hands of an ever-diminishing number of powerful financial concerns. The trusts, monopolies and gigantic industrial combinations are coming to be the ruling factors in the life of the nation, in-

dustrial, political and spiritual, and the masses of the people are sinking into a condition of ever greater dependence. The number of propertyless wage-earners is on the increase; their material existence is growing more precarious, and the spirit of dissatisfaction and revolt is developing among them. The relations between the classes of producers and the employing classes are marked by intense, though not always conscious, class-antagonism and by overt class struggles.

Within the last few years the organized workers of the United States have been assailed with unusual severity by the organized capitalists, the government, the state and national legislatures, and particularly by the courts. These concerted attacks have served to demonstrate to many workers that the present methods and form of organization of the American trade-unions are lacking in efficiency. The trade-unions are beginning to revise their methods of warfare. They have, within the last few years, made considerable advance in the direction of greater organic and interdependent industrial organization, and they have entered the field of politics as a class. True, their steps in both directions have been uncertain, groping and even faulty, but they are nevertheless steps in the right direction. A few more intense industrial struggles, a few more adverse court decisions, a few more political disappointments, and the organized workers of the United States will be forced into a solid industrial and political class organization, working in close

harmony and co-operation with the Socialist movement.

Similarly hopeful for the progress of Socialism is the mental attitude of all other masses of the population. The phenomenal political strength developed from time to time by the sporadic reform movements is a strong indication of the popular dissatisfaction with existing conditions. These movements are, as a rule, very indefinite in their aims and superficial in their programs. They attract the masses by their general radicalism and the promise of a small measure of immediate relief. From their very nature they are bound to be ineffective and short-lived, and their disappointed adherents become peculiarly susceptible to the appeals of Socialism.

Thus the conditions for the growth of a powerful Socialist movement in this country are rapidly maturing and the rate of that growth will largely depend upon the ability of the Socialists to take advantage of these conditions and to win the confidence and support of the discontented masses and especially of the workers.

American Socialism has not as yet evolved definite and settled policies and methods, but the more recent phases of its development tend to indicate that it is beginning to solve its problems and to overcome its obstacles.

Within the short period of twelve years the Socialist Party has grown from a state of insignificance to the importance of a serious factor in the national

life of the United States. It is safe to predict that in another dozen years it will contend with the old parties for political supremacy.