

The SLP and The USSR

From the Bolshevik Revolution
To the Nazi-Soviet Pact

Socialist Labor Party of America
P.O. Box 218
Mountain View, CA 94042-0218
www.slp.org • socialists@slp.org

Contents

Introduction	3
1. Response to the October Revolution	12
2. The SLP and the Third International	19
3. Stalin, the Purges and World War II	28
Appendix: De Leon and the 1905 Revolution	36

Introduction

The publication of this pamphlet fills a long-felt gap in Socialist Labor Party literature. Drawing on the Party's internal organizational history as well as its public record, the pamphlet traces the evolution of the SLP's attitude toward the U.S.S.R. from its first response to the October Revolution in 1917 through its refusal to join the Third International to its final break with the Soviet Union on the eve of World War II. For the first time, it sets down in one place the SLP's history on one of the key questions of the 20th century.

Since the pamphlet does this quite well, there is no need to restate its contents here. Instead, by way of introduction, the opportunity presents itself to shed some light on one of the secondary themes of the pamphlet, namely the relationship between Lenin, Daniel De Leon and the SLP. Specifically, what did Lenin know of De Leon and the party associated with his name, and in what light should Lenin's statements on De Leon (statements well known to those familiar with SLP history) be viewed? Although the current pamphlet touches on this topic insofar as it affected the SLP's early attitude toward Russia, more complete information helps to fill out the picture. Though even a brief theoretical comparison of their work is beyond the scope of an introduction, the relatively small body of documentary evidence linking Lenin and De Leon can be reviewed.

While both Lenin and De Leon were in attendance at several Congresses of the Second International, they apparently never met. It is known that De Leon received the Russian Social Democratic paper, *Iskra*, with which Lenin was associated at least through 1903. But there is no mention of Lenin in De Leon's works. In fact, up until 1914, when De Leon died and the First World War transformed the international socialist movement, the generally recognized representative of Russian Marxism was George Plekhanov, and it was Plekhanov to whom De Leon was likely to refer when discussing Russian socialism. (See, for example, De Leon's *Flashlights of the Amsterdam Congress*.)

Likewise, it does not appear that Lenin was familiar with De Leon prior to 1915. What seems to have first sparked Lenin's interest in the SLP and eventually De Leon was his effort to regroup an "internation-

The SLP and the USSR

alist tendency” in the world socialist movement in the wake of the collapse of the Second International. In September 1915, one year after the major Social Democratic parties of the Second International had capitulated to opportunism and supported their ruling classes’ participation in the imperialist war, Lenin led the left wing at the famous Zimmerwald Conference in Switzerland. The conference issued a manifesto denouncing the war and served as a rallying point for the internationalist elements in the socialist movement of Europe.

Soon after this conference, Lenin’s coworker in the Bolshevik party and the future leader of the Workers’ Opposition, Alexandra Kollantai, traveled to the United States. Lenin urged her to contact any elements which might be responsive to the Zimmerwald appeal and to establish communications with revolutionary Socialists in the United States.

By this time, the SLP, which had denounced the imperialist war from its onset, had in effect already broken with the Second International. When it received a copy of the Zimmerwald manifesto, it was immediately impressed and published an enthusiastic report in the *Weekly People* identifying the SLP with the manifesto’s intentions and implying that a new International might eventually be constructed out of its supporters. Accordingly, when Kollantai came to the United States in the fall of 1915, she and the SLP were able to find common ground.

The Russian Socialist leader had articles published in the *Weekly People* and met with SLP National Secretary Arnold Petersen at Party headquarters.¹ These contacts were reported to Lenin. Together with a number of SLP publications, they apparently laid the basis for Lenin’s first opinions about the SLP.

There is no doubt that Lenin’s knowledge of the socialist movement in the United States at this time was restricted. His remarks on foreign socialist movements, particularly in the United States, are repeatedly punctuated with observations on the “incredibly great” difficulties of communication and his inability to “judge from afar.” In a letter to Kollantai in early 1917, he notes, “It is a great pity that I cannot collect all the documents about the SLP.”²

Nevertheless, it is clear that Lenin had read the *Weekly People*. He was aware of attempts to promote unity between the SLP and the Socialist Party and was familiar with the SLP’s stance against the war

¹Petersen’s account of his meeting with Kollantai appears in the December 29, 1917, *Weekly People*. He writes that they disagreed on several points, including the role of revolutionary industrial unions. According to a letter from Lenin to Inessa Armand written on February 19, 1917, Kollantai was “afraid of anarcho-syndicalist tendencies in the SLP.” Ironically, within a few years, Kollantai was accused of anarcho-syndicalism by the Bolshevik party for heading up the Workers’ Opposition, which demanded that control of the Soviet economy be turned over to the unions.

²*Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, Moscow. Vol. 35, pp. 285–286.

Socialist Labor Party

and, to some extent at least, with its basic program. In the years from 1915 through 1917 there are a number of references to the SLP in Lenin's writings, generally in the same vein, identifying the Party as part of the internationalist, revolutionary wing of the socialist movement. A typical example is in his May 1917 article, *The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution*. There Lenin speaks of those who "alone are internationalists *in deed*," mentioning among others, "in the United States, the Socialist Labor Party..."³

It was their common proletarian opposition to the imperialist war that formed the strongest link between the SLP and the Russian revolutionaries. This common stance not only drew the attention of Kollantai and Lenin, but in February 1917, the same month that the Russian czar was overthrown, Leon Trotsky, then in exile and living in New York City, spoke from an SLP platform at a Party-sponsored anti-war rally in New York City's Cooper Union.⁴

But there were other matters involved besides the war. The split in the world socialist movement reflected a deeper division within the Second International over its entire conception of socialist revolution. The internationalist current was breaking with reformism and opportunism in all areas, not just the war, and this led to a search for similarities on other programmatic points. It is in this light that Lenin's sparse and incomplete comments during this period about the SLP's program should be viewed.

As noted earlier, it is not clear exactly how much Lenin knew about the SLP program of Socialist Industrial Unionism, and his references to it are ambiguous. In early 1916, a few months after Kollantai's visit to America, Lenin wondered "are they [the SLP] maniacs with an *idée fixe* about a special 'economic' organization of workers?"⁵ Yet over the course of the next year, either as a result of new information or perhaps evolution in his own thinking under the pressure of the revolutionary events of 1917, Lenin's references to the SLP's program were more favorable. He seems to have been impressed by two features of the SLP: its uncompromising rejection of reformism and its call for the replacement of the capitalist state by an industrial democracy of the organized workers.

On the first point—that of reformism—Lenin was apparently under a certain misimpression. While he was correct about the SLP's rejection of reformism, he was not clear about the origins of that stance. In 1916–17, he refers in several instances to the SLP as having "thrown out the whole minimum program."⁶ By "minimum program" Lenin

³*Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 79.

⁴*Weekly People*, February 24, 1917.

⁵*Collected Works*, Vol. 36, p. 375.

⁶*Collected Works*, Vol. 35, pp. 254, 285, 288.

The SLP and the USSR

meant the reformist demands which marked the platforms of the major parties of the Second International. In most cases, those parties which were rejecting the minimum program of reforms in favor of the revolutionary call for the overthrow of capitalism were deepening their recent break with revisionism.

But the SLP did not “throw out the minimum program” in 1916. To the extent that the SLP had reform demands in its program they were thrown out in 1900 when the Socialist Party split away from the SLP and De Leon’s Party redrew its platform. What Lenin was apparently referring to was the fact that in unity discussions between the SP and the SLP in the winter of 1916–17—discussions of which Lenin was aware—the SLP emphasized its revolutionary program in opposition to the SP’s minimum reformism. However, there was no basic change in the SLP’s program at this time.

Lenin’s attention to the second point—that of replacing the capitalist state with some form of workers’ industrial organization was undoubtedly heavily influenced by the rise of the soviets in Russia. Whereas in March 1916 he ridiculed the SLP’s ideas about a “special ‘economic’ organization of workers,” in March 1917 soviets and factory committees were becoming the heart of the Russian revolutionary movement and a new focus of Lenin’s thinking. It is this aspect that Lenin probably had in mind when, writing to Kollantai about the lines of a new revolutionary program, he said:

*“On no account a repetition of something like the Second International! On no account with Kautsky! Definitely a more revolutionary programme and tactics (there are elements of it in K. Liebknecht, the SLP in America, the Dutch Marxists, etc.)”*⁷

Seven months later, in preparing materials for a revision of the Bolshevik party program, Lenin suggested, “We may also mention the American Socialist Labor Party and its demand that ‘the political state give way to industrial democracy.’”⁸

It was soon after the above was written that the first of the independent reports of Lenin’s knowledge of De Leon appeared in the wake of the October Revolution. Up until this point there is no special mention of De Leon in Lenin’s writings and his comments on the SLP reflect not so much the influence of De Leon or the SLP, but the citation of a number of important points which Lenin found compatible with the evolution of his own thinking.

This, then, is the background for evaluating the four main reports of Lenin’s opinion of De Leon. These accounts, well known in SLP circles, played a significant role in shaping certain of the Party’s attitudes

⁷*Collected Works*, Vol. 35, p. 296.

⁸*Collected Works*, Vol. 26, p. 175.

Socialist Labor Party

toward Lenin and the Bolshevik revolution. The first came in the *New York World* of January 31, 1918. There journalist Arno Dosch-Fleuret wrote:

“Daniel De Leon, late head of the Socialist Labor Party of America, is playing, through his writings, an important part in the construction of a socialist state in Russia. The Bolshevik leaders are finding his ideas of an industrial state in advance of Karl Marx’s theories.

“Lenin, closing his speech on the adoption of the Rights of Workers Bill in the Congress [of Soviets], showed the influence of De Leon, whose governmental construction, on the basis of industries, fits admirably into the Soviet construction of the state now forming in Russia. De Leon is really the first American Socialist to affect European thought.”

While this report goes beyond anything that can be found in Lenin’s own writings regarding De Leon, it is nevertheless basically consistent with the references cited earlier. It may also have reflected the fact that Lenin had received some of De Leon’s works from Boris Reinstein, an SLP member who was in Petrograd in 1917.

The second such report came a few months later in the form of an address by John Reed, author of *Ten Days That Shook the World* and a founding member of the U.S. Communist Party, to the National Executive Committee of the SLP. According to the *Weekly People* of May 11, 1918:

“Premier Lenin, Reed said, is a great admirer of Daniel De Leon, considering him the greatest of modern Socialists—the only one who has added anything to socialist thought since Marx.... It is Lenin’s opinion, Reed said, that the industrial state as conceived by De Leon will ultimately have to be the form of government in Russia.”

Two qualifications must be put on this quote, however. First, it does not appear as a direct quote in the original *Weekly People* article but is apparently a paraphrase of Reed’s remarks. More significant, as the text of this pamphlet points out, Reed may have also been motivated by a desire to draw the SLP toward those elements forming the American Communist Party. Hence, while there is no reason to doubt that Reed’s report had some basis in fact (especially since it resembles similar reports from other sources), it may well have been exaggerated for political purposes.

A third report appeared in the *New York World* on February 3, 1919. This consisted of an account of an interview between Lenin and Robert Minor, a radical artist who later became a staunch Stalinist and writer for the CP’s *Daily Worker*. According to the interview, Lenin said:

“America is a great country, great in technical achievements. Marvellous developments are possible there. The American Daniel De Leon first formulated the idea of Soviet government, which grew up on his idea. Future society will be organized along soviet lines. There will be

The SLP and the USSR

soviet rather than geographical boundaries for nations. Industrial unionism is the basic thing. That is what we are building.”

An attempt was later made by Minor and Max Eastman, an associate of Minor’s at the time, to retract or modify this quote. However, their effort appears to have been motivated mainly by factional organizational considerations as ardent CP supporters. After an exchange in the *Weekly People* during which Eastman’s attempted “modifications” were fairly well exposed as groundless, Eastman conceded, “There must have been a conversation in which Lenin expressed his admiration for De Leon.”⁹

The final report appears in the book *Six Weeks in Russia* by the British writer Arthur Ransome. Ransome recounts a conversation with Lenin as follows:

“He said he had read in an English socialist paper a comparison of his own theories with those of an American, Daniel De Leon. He had then borrowed some of De Leon’s pamphlets from Reinstein (who belongs to the party which De Leon founded in America), read them for the first time, and was amazed to see how far and how early De Leon had pursued the same train of thought as the Russians. His theory that representation should be by industries, not by areas, was already the germ of the Soviet system. He remembered seeing De Leon at an International Conference. De Leon made no impression at all, a grey old man, quite unable to speak to such an audience; but evidently a much bigger man than he looked, since his pamphlets were written before the experience of the Russian Revolution of 1905. Some days afterwards I noticed that Lenin had introduced a few phrases of De Leon, as if to do honor to his memory, into the draft for the new programme of the Communist Party.”

Reinstein’s role as a “link” between De Leon and Lenin is explained in detail in this pamphlet. However, it is clear from the citations already cited in this introduction that while Reinstein made Lenin more familiar with De Leon and his works, Lenin was to some extent aware of the SLP and probably of De Leon even prior to his contact with Reinstein. As for the article comparing Lenin and De Leon referred to above, it appeared in the British publication *Workers’ Dreadnought* in 1918. It was written by William Paul, a former member of the British SLP who joined the British Communist Party when it was formed and who tried unsuccessfully to take the rest of the SLP with him. Like John Reed, Paul probably had a political interest in tying De Leon and Lenin together in the eyes of SLP members, though this would not affect the accuracy of Ransome’s report.

In 1920, there are two further references to De Leon in Lenin’s writ-

⁹*Weekly People*, September 13, 1919 and October 4, 1919.

Socialist Labor Party

ings which tend to complicate, rather than clear up the picture of Lenin's view of De Leon. The first appears in *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, and is probably the most widely known reference to De Leon by Lenin outside the SLP.

In the section, "Should revolutionaries work in reactionary trade unions?" Lenin speaks of "labor lieutenants of the capitalist class,' to use the splendid and profoundly true expression of the followers of Daniel De Leon in America."¹⁰

What makes this reference ironic, however, is that it occurs in the course of an argument *against* one of De Leon's most characteristic and strongly held positions, namely that workers should build revolutionary industrial unions in opposition to and apart from the reformist craft unions. While De Leon at times saw the necessity for conducting socialist agitation within the craft unions, his greatest contributions and energies during his socialist career were directed toward setting on foot a new revolutionary union movement. It is in the midst of vehemently denouncing just such a strategy that Lenin refers approvingly to De Leon, thereby calling into question whether he ever understood or agreed with De Leon on this basic point.

Another reference to De Leon can be found a few months later, in the late summer of 1920. Lenin wrote a brief letter to N. Bukharin¹¹ as follows:

Comrade Bukharin,

I think we *should* publish in Russian De Leon's *Two Pages [From Roman History]* with Fraina's foreword and notes. I shall also write a few words.

If you agree, *will you give the word* through the State Publishing House. If you don't, let's discuss it.

LENIN

According to the Moscow edition of Lenin's collected works, however, no Russian edition of De Leon's pamphlet appeared. Therefore Lenin never wrote the "few words" which might have clarified thoroughly his opinion of the American Marxist.

This pretty well exhausts Lenin's references to De Leon. The plain fact is that the scattered remarks to be found in Lenin's writings and the independent reports of his attitude toward De Leon do not really permit a definitive conclusion as to Lenin's overall estimate of De Leon's life and work. In some ways the references are contradictory, in other ways ambiguous, in some ways inexplicable. For example, three months after Reed reportedly said Lenin was "a great admirer of Daniel De

¹⁰*Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 53.

¹¹*Collected Works*, Vol. 36, p. 528.

The SLP and the USSR

Leon, considering him the greatest of modern Socialists,” the Russian premier wrote a special *Letter to American Workers* (August 1918) seeking support for the Soviet struggle against the Allied invasion. Yet while that letter mentions Socialist Party leader Eugene Debs, it makes no mention of either De Leon or the SLP. These and similar examples continue to raise questions, and unless new material surfaces (and the possibility that material has been overlooked or suppressed cannot be wholly ruled out), answers will be difficult to find.

Some things can be said with a fair degree of certainty, however.

There is little doubt that Lenin considered De Leon an outstanding figure of the revolutionary element in the left wing of the Second International, who could be ranked with other leaders of that period such as Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, Anton Pannekoek, etc. Lenin also probably recognized that De Leon had made a special contribution toward analyzing the nature and structure of socialist society and that his theory of revolutionary industrial unionism in some ways anticipated the organizational features of soviets, factory committees, and other forms of revolutionary mass workers’ organizations which emerged from the proletarian struggles of the postwar period.

But to claim more—that Lenin was a “disciple” of De Leon or his “student,” or even that he was heavily “influenced” by De Leon—is to walk on thin ice indeed. Contentions such as the following made by former SLP National Secretary Arnold Petersen are clearly exaggerations:

“The apparent inconsistencies [in Lenin’s work and life], however, are easily understood once we realize that the Lenin of post-1918 days is a somewhat different Lenin from the one of ante-1918 days, the reason for the difference being that before 1918 Lenin, like most of his contemporaries, was in total ignorance of the life and works of Daniel De Leon. It was not so with the later Lenin. In 1918 and subsequent years, Lenin devoted himself to a study of De Leon’s works, recognizing (and giving unreserved expression to the recognition) in De Leon a Marxist of the highest order and without a peer during the time that he worked in the socialist cause.”¹²

Such assessments, which were not uncommon among SLP spokespersons in the first decades after the Russian Revolution, are not only inaccurate—as there is evidence that Lenin knew of De Leon before 1918—but they were almost certainly motivated at least in part by certain political pressures on the SLP. The American devotees of Bolshevism, who in their efforts to build the U.S. Communist Party, traded heavily on the instinctive sympathy of workers everywhere for the Russian Revolution, turned Lenin into a god. His prestige was invoked repeat-

¹²*Proletarian Democracy vs. Dictatorships and Despotism*, New York Labor News, 1932, p. 12.

Socialist Labor Party

edly in all projects, including the one mentioned in this pamphlet, of breaking up the SLP and bringing it into the CP.

In an effort to turn the CP's Lenin cult back upon itself and to combat propagandistically the CP's growing influence, the SLP was undoubtedly moved to get the most mileage possible out of the few references to De Leon which had come from the CP's own leader. In the process, the evidence was used in an exaggerated and largely uncritical fashion. Like the Party's initial enthusiasm for the October Revolution, its initial assessment of the ties between De Leon and Lenin proved, in the end, to have been overstated.

August 1978

Response to the October Revolution

I.

When news of the Bolshevik revolution rose above the imperialist slaughter of World War I and reached the United States, the Socialist Labor Party welcomed it with enthusiasm. It hoped the revolution would be the long awaited spark for workers' revolutions in Germany, France, Great Britain and even the United States.

With this in mind, the SLP closely followed the course of the revolution and the class wars that intensified in the capitalist West. Reports on the progress of the revolution and the struggles in Europe, proclamations issued by the Bolshevik government, speeches and statements by Lenin and Trotsky, all these became a staple in the *Weekly People* during the weeks after the revolution.

The first editorial treatment, however, appeared on November 24, 1917, about three weeks after the Petrograd insurrection. In a piece titled, "The Russian Situation," Arnold Petersen, then the Party's National Secretary, gave what he later called "a brief and sketchy outline of the Russian Bolshevik revolution." Despite its relative brevity, the points Petersen raised were to provide the basis for the Party's position on this historic event.

Petersen began by offering three criteria necessary for the victory of socialism: First, a relatively high development of productive forces; second, a classconscious proletariat; and third, the organization of that proletariat, politically and industrially, "for the express purpose of overthrowing the existing order, supplanting the political state by the industrial representative councils of the workers."

In laying down the first two, Petersen was merely emphasizing what the international socialist movement, including the Bolsheviks themselves, had held for decades. In the last, Petersen reflected the SLP's De Leonist program, which focused on the need for the organization of the working class into a movement ready to assume management of society once the bourgeoisie was overthrown.

Having laid down these criteria, Petersen drew the obvious conclusion that Russia in 1917 lacked the material basis and, in large measure, the necessary proletariat, to advance to socialism. "Russia as a

Socialist Labor Party

whole,” he wrote, “is woefully behind in capitalist development. By far the majority of the population is composed of peasants, a large number of whom are illiterate, and wholly ignorant as regards the object of the labor movement and the nature of the social revolution. Consequently, not only is the material groundwork for socialism lacking, but the human element—a classconscious proletariat—is largely absent.”

Petersen added another point. “Last, but not least, the industrial proletariat is not—so far as we are able to learn—organized in industrial unions, the condition *sine qua non* of the Socialist Republic.”

As the Party learned more about the organization of soviets in revolutionary Russia, it was to revise its views on this last point. For some period after, it saw in the soviets the embryonic form of socialist organizations analogous to the Socialist Industrial Union. Nevertheless, the initial skepticism about the ability of such proletarian forms of revolutionary organization to survive in the Russian situation proved valid. The soviets and the factory committees produced in the revolutionary upsurge were soon superseded by state institutions and party bodies controlled from above.

Yet despite this overall analysis (which reflected the Party’s assessment of cold reality rather than its hopes or desires), Petersen did not put forth a “Menshevik position.” The Mensheviks in Russia and their counterparts abroad had argued that Russia’s economic underdevelopment logically put a bourgeois democracy, not a Socialist Republic, on the historical agenda. Accordingly, they argued against, and actively opposed, all efforts by the Russian workers to go beyond bourgeois democratic demands to socialist ones. In practice they supported the liberal bourgeois government of Kerensky, opposed the expropriation of capitalists and landowners, and advocated Russia’s continued participation in the imperialist war.

Petersen’s article put forth a different view. While he agreed that a socialist program could not succeed in Russia alone, he did not agree that the workers should support Kerensky. “...It must be clear,” he wrote, “that at the present time their [the Bolsheviks’] social program has not a ghost of a chance of success. Yet, they cannot honestly subscribe to the program of the Kerensky element—seeing that this element, whatever its protestations, and possible good intentions—is bent on a war ‘to the finish,’ at the same time allying itself with the interests of the bourgeoisie. So long as the Bolshevik [element] was in opposition it was doing excellent agitational work. Now that it is in power it faces failure. The day of its victory was the day of its defeat.”

Petersen held that the hope of avoiding this failure and defeat depended on international events. “The hope of Russia lies in an early general peace. But even then the fruits of the Russian Revolution can only be gathered if social revolution takes place in the leading capital-

The SLP and the USSR

ist countries of the world, ending this miserable system of production, and establishing the socialist cooperative commonwealth. For while it is true that Russia cannot take the lead in social revolution, and establish socialism as an example for the world to follow, it can and will follow suit when social revolution has succeeded in the leading capitalist countries...with the rest of the world organized into industrial commonwealths, commonwealths where the ownership of the means of production, etc., is actually vested in the producers, it is altogether reasonable to suppose that countries such as Russia may finish their economic development under a general world regime of socialism, and with the aid of the workers in the various countries.”¹³

The November 24 article contained, in summary fashion, all the major elements that would emerge in the Party’s analysis of the U.S.S.R.: a rejection, based on materialist analysis, of the possibility of establishing socialism in industrially backward Russia; support for the socialist aspirations and proletarian spirit of the revolution; hope that the revolutionary flame would spread to the West and bring material help for the Russian workers while burying capitalism on a world scale.

Nevertheless, Petersen’s article touched off a sharp debate in the columns of the *Weekly People*. Some argued the analysis was factually wrong, and—mistaking the advanced pockets of capitalism in Russia for the general situation in the country as a whole—contended that Russia was an advanced capitalist nation ready for socialism immediately. Others, arguing emotionally, complained that Petersen had offered “no alternative, no hope whatsoever for any way out of the situation” and had unnecessarily painted it as “hopeless.”

Some of these criticisms came from elements that had left or were about to leave the Party for the reformist Socialist Party, and who were already in conflict with the SLP on other issues. The tide of emotionalism that flowed after the October revolution also undoubtedly colored the nature of the debate.

In any event, Petersen defended his article in a number of subsequent columns. Denying that he had portrayed the situation as “hopeless,” he wrote in response to one letter, “One may fight and agitate for a principle, pending the ripening of conditions when these principles will be applicable, as, for example, Marx and Engels did in 1848, when

¹³The position that a revolution in the industrialized countries of the West was essential to the success of the Russian Revolution corresponded with the Bolshevik viewpoint. For example, in Soviet Russia of February 12, 1921, Karl Radek, a Bolshevik theoretician and member of the soviet government, was reported to have made the following observation: “At the conclusion of the Brest Treaty, the Soviet government estimated the breathing spell afforded by this peace as a very short one; either the world revolution would soon come and rescue Soviet Russia, or Soviet Russia would go down in the unequal conflict—such was our view at that time. And this conception was in accordance with the situation at that moment.”

Socialist Labor Party

they started their fight for socialism by issuing the *Communist Manifesto*.” He again pointed out that “the conflagration started in Russia may spread to other countries, and if the workers in these countries (notably in Germany, England, France, Italy and the United States) prepare properly, the Russian revolution will be saved...”

In the same statement, Petersen also tried to clarify his attitude toward the Bolsheviks. “Comrade Mins,” he wrote, “inferentially accuses me of finding fault with the Bolsheviks for not being able to establish socialism in Russia at present; charges me with playing the funeral march ‘for the action of a movement,’ and says I regard the Russian revolutionists now in power as impossibilists. The fact is I have done none of these things [and] have not intended to...I indicated clearly my sympathies for the Bolsheviks.”

Petersen’s analysis was not without its contradictions. Moreover, the ways in which it was to be elaborated and acted on were the subject of much Party debate over the next two decades. Nevertheless, as an initial response to a momentous, complex social explosion, it had the elements of a sound analysis: critical support for the first seemingly successful attempt at a workers’ revolution.

But while the SLP shared the general optimism of the times, it never fell victim to the tide of blind emotionalism that swept through the radical movement in this country and much of the world. It did not dissolve into the wake of the “great October revolution.” From the beginning it took an independent, critical position.

Furthermore, it never lost sight of the fact that the Bolshevik program was a product of czarist Russia and could not be adopted wholesale by the workers of other countries. The American working class had its own revolution to make and the SLP still saw that as its primary focus. This orientation was to have a substantial impact on relations between the SLP and the new Soviet state as they developed after 1917.

II.

While the SLP did not uncritically jump on the Bolshevik bandwagon after the revolution, neither did it close its eyes to its revolutionary obligations to the Russian proletariat. At the end of the First World War, the United States and its allies, France and Great Britain, stepped up their efforts to crush the new Bolshevik government. Motivated by the spirit of proletarian internationalism, the SLP reacted with sharp opposition to the intervention in Russia.

The SLP exposed the vicious anti-Bolshevik propaganda coming from capitalist quarters and revealed the real motivations behind it. It demanded that the United States withdraw its forces from Russia and it supported this demand with practical actions.

Even before the armistice ending the First World War was signed in

The SLP and the USSR

1918, the SLP had recognized that the real aim of the Allied troops in Russia was to crush the Bolshevik government and set up a government “composed of adherents of the former czar, i.e., outspoken monarchists, and of capitalists, with a sprinkling of alleged revolutionists for the sake of giving these fraudulent creations a plausible coloring.”

This contention was confirmed after the war, when Allied troops and supplies continued to flow to Russia. Back home, the U.S. capitalist class could no longer keep up the fiction that Allied troops were in Russia to protect Allied war materiel. New rationalizations were invented, among them the claim that the Allies were helping the Russian people fight “Bolshevik tyranny,” which was painted in the most horrifying terms.

One official SLP document from this period speaks of the “veritable floods of abuse, lies, slander, calumny [that] were poured out upon Russia in the press, the pulpit, the movies, through every agency the capitalist class has of poisoning the minds of the people. It looked as though the word ‘Bolsheviki,’ when translated into English, meant murder, arson, rape, mayhem—any one of these or all of them put together.”

Only the revolution’s direct attack on private property and the privileged position of the ruling classes could account for such venom as was directed against the Bolsheviks. The nationalization of the industries, land and natural resources “was a most grievous offense to all the imperialists of the world, our own included,” said the SLP near the end of 1918. The “loss” of Russia was a major setback that would intensify the economic contradictions of world capitalism. “As a market for surplus commodities of imperialist countries,” the SLP noted, “Russia will become less and less of an asset, a truly terrifying prospect from the imperialist point of view.”

While the capitalist world marshaled its forces against Bolshevism, the SLP used its limited resources to mount a countercampaign against the intervention.

In late 1918, the Party issued an appeal to the U.S. working class. “We propose to you that you join us in a nationwide protest against intervention in Russia by *any* power and in a demand upon our government at once to withdraw our troops from that country and to see to it that the troops of other governments are likewise withdrawn,” said a Party pamphlet entitled, *Withdraw From Russia*.

The Party also mounted a petition drive to be sent to the House and Senate. While popular opposition to government policy was duly registered by this protest action, it was not geared toward building a mass movement that might have been used to educate workers and draw them into the socialist movement.

Some criticism along these lines came from the National Executive Committee of the Lettish Language Federation (SLF). In 1919, it sent a

Socialist Labor Party

statement to the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the SLP in which it took issue with “trying to avert the armed imperialistic attacks on the Russian socialistic Soviet government by gathering signatures and sending protest petitions to the Senators and Congressmen of the United States.”

Such tactics, it continued, “instead of awakening [the working class] put it to sleep,” and are therefore “harmful to our principles.” It concluded: “The Russian Soviet government needs the help of the American proletariat, not the charity of the United States Congress.” However, it proposed no concrete alternatives to the Party’s campaign.

The NEC upheld the strategy of petitioning Congress, and defended its decision by saying it was acting in accordance with the “wishes of the Russian proletariat.” It cited an appeal in the May 1919 issue of *The Liberator* addressed to “All the Workingmen and Working Women of the United States” and signed by the “Workingmen’s Red Cross, Central Committee Labor Unions, Vladivostock, Siberia.”

Among other things, the appeal called upon U.S. workers to “Protest against the organized killing of your brothers. Demand the withdrawal of American troops from Russia.” The NEC argued that a protest campaign demanding that the government withdraw its troops was a legitimate response to this appeal.

The Party continued to agitate against the Allied intervention, and eventually expanded the scope of its support work for the Russian Revolution. When reports of food shortages caused by the civil war began to reach the United States, the SLP organized the Russian Famine Relief Fund. During 1922, it sent a total of \$1,255 to the Soviet Republic through the Russian Red Cross, according to the 1923 National Executive Committee report. The bulk of the money was collected by the SLP’s South Slavonian Federation.

While this was obviously a minor contribution when stacked up against the vast needs of the Russian proletariat, it was a significant sum for a small band of workers to raise at the time. Moreover, it reflected the strong solidarity SLP members felt with Russia’s revolutionary workers as well as their internationalist orientation.

By this time, reactionary forces in the United States were in full motion and a great “red scare” was sweeping the country. During the early twenties suspected Communists and Socialists were harassed by the government and sometimes rounded up and deported. Since many SLP members, particularly in the Party’s foreign language federations, were immigrants, the anticommunist deportations posed a severe threat.

But the rise of reaction in the United States did not lead the Party to equivocate on its support for the Russian Revolution. Rather it did its best to set forth the Party’s position clearly and openly for the working

The SLP and the USSR

class (and ruling class) to see. “We owe it to ourselves and to posterity to show where we stand,” one official Party document said.

In 1921, the Party sent an open letter to Senator Overman, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee. The committee was a part of the anticommunist campaign aimed at stamping out the left in the United States. In the words of the SLP’s letter, it was “authorized and instructed by the United States Senate to investigate the so-called Bolshevik propaganda which is said to have reached gigantic proportions in this country.”

Instead of minimizing the similarities between the SLP and the Bolsheviks, the letter emphasized them in an effort to express the SLP’s solidarity with Soviet workers. “If it is real ‘American Bolshevism’ which you are interested to trace out and investigate,” it told the committee, “it is the Socialist Labor Party you will have to investigate first and last.”

The Party’s statement also refused to make any concessions to the capitalists’ incessant attack on “Bolshevik tactics” given the blatantly anticommunist aims of the investigation. “We are Socialists and revolutionists,” it declared, “and as such we will and must adopt such tactics as will bring about the revolution and insure order in the new social structure in the quickest and most expedient manner.”

“As to the Russian Bolsheviks,” the letter went on, “we have nothing to do or to say about their tactics; we have no reliable information as to what has actually taken place; and as to whether the Russian revolutionists have adopted the best possible methods under their trying circumstances, or whether they have committed blunder upon blunder which has cost hundreds or thousands of lives, not we, Mr. Senator, but future history alone has the right and power to judge. We are Americans, and Americans, above all people, should be tolerant with those who may be forced, as the American revolutionists were forced, to suffer privation, to starve, and to die, to organize armies and fight their own flesh and blood for the cause they hold dear—a cause which means the happiness of the future....”

In all, then, against the background of the Allied intervention abroad and the anti-Bolshevik hysteria at home, the SLP took up a basic position of solidarity with the Russian working class. Nevertheless, the differences between the SLP and Bolshevism were far from dissolved. In fact, they would soon become more acute as the SLP responded to the launching of the Third International.

The SLP and the Third International

I.

The Russian Revolution had as profound an impact on the world socialist movement as it did on the internal situation in Russia. In response to the first wave of enthusiasm it unleashed, many radicals from around the world flocked to Moscow to participate in the monumental events then unfolding.

As the first revolutionary party to take and hold state power expressly in the name of the working class and of socialism, the Bolsheviks commanded authority and exercised influence even in movements that bore little direct resemblance to their own. Given the often uncritical and highly emotional nature of support for the revolution, the pressure mounted on revolutionary organizations outside Russia to adopt the Bolshevik program and strategy, without regard for differences in economic and political conditions in their countries.

The SLP was not immune to the pro-Bolshevik sentiments sweeping the ranks of radicals in America. Yet the Party resisted every attempt to make it a carbon copy or mere appendage of the Bolshevik party. While it continued to give support to the Soviet government, the SLP held that its own program and tactics had to be developed in accordance with the situation in the United States.

This position was hardly calculated to attract Bolshevik sympathizers in this country. In fact, it set many against the Party at a time when it was already involved in struggles against anarcho-syndicalist and reformist elements.

The Party's relationship to the international socialist movement at the time was also in a state of flux. Even before the First World War, the SLP had begun to grow disillusioned with the reformist orientation of the Second International. Once the imperialist war started and the Social Democrats who dominated the organization rallied to the support of their national bourgeoisies, the SLP recognized that the International was bankrupt of Marxist principles.

Though the Party did not formally withdraw its membership until 1919, the basic political break came nearly five years earlier. By December of 1914, the *Weekly People* had concluded editorially that "the

The SLP and the USSR

international socialist movement collapsed like a house of cards in face of the war.” By 1915, the Party was discussing the prospects for forming a new International.

In 1919, the Moscow-based Third International was formed. Subsequently a report appeared in the labor press that the SLP, along with 38 other groups and parties, had been cited by the newly founded International as “qualified” for membership. The report fed hopes among Party members that the SLP would soon see the day when it could join an International based on Marxist principles. Several years later, however, the Party noted that it had never received “a single official statement or invitation” from the Third International.

The Party was prepared to consider membership in the new world organization in accordance with certain general principles outlined by the National Executive Committee in 1919 when it withdrew from the Second International.

At that year’s session, the NEC laid down four principles upon which it said it favored building a new International. A look at those conditions makes it clear that, from the start, there was little possibility that the SLP and the Third International would join hands.

By itself, the first condition would seem to have posed no major obstacle to the SLP’s affiliation with the Third International. It called for “the formation of a new International based upon clear-cut revolutionary principles, the unqualified recognition of the antagonism of interests of the capitalist and wage-working class and of the inevitable class struggle resulting therefrom, terminable only by the complete overthrow of the capitalist system of production by the revolutionary, classconscious action of the working class.”

An emphasis on revolutionary industrial unionism had been the basis of the SLP’s opposition to the reformism and parliamentarism of the Socialist Party in the United States and the social democratic character of the parties in the Second International. But the sponsors of the Third International were unlikely to have any real appreciation for the Party’s second point. It declared that “the recognition, endorsement, and active support of...revolutionary, industrial unionism should be made a condition for admission into the new international.”

Many of the delegates to the Third International, including the dominant Soviet group, were from countries where industrialization was still in its infancy and where the SLP’s program of Socialist Industrial Unionism had limited applicability. Thus, while the SLP was later to criticize the Third International for trying to force a program fitted to undeveloped countries on the socialist movement in the industrially advanced United States, in 1919 the NEC made the Party vulnerable to a similar charge—that it was trying to force underdeveloped nations to adopt a program applicable only in highly industrialized ones.

Socialist Labor Party

That Socialist Industrial Unionism was such a program was made clear by none other than De Leon himself. In his famous 1905 address, now published under the title, *Socialist Reconstruction of Society*, De Leon said:

“In no country, outside of the United States, is this theory applicable; in no country, outside of the United States, is the theory rational. It is irrational and, therefore, inapplicable in all other countries, with the possible exception of Great Britain and the rest of the English-speaking world, because no country but the United States has reached that stage of full-orbed capitalism—economic, political, and social—that the United States has attained.”

That situation had not altered significantly in the intervening 14 years.

The NEC's third condition was that the tactics of each affiliate be decided by its own membership. Finally, it said that the new International must exclude anarcho-syndicalists. Neither of these conditions was ever met by the Third International.

The SLP's hopes of joining a new International never materialized. The Bolsheviks knew little about the American movement and probably even less about the SLP. In their desperate situation, they obviously didn't have time to stop and learn. They faced their own overwhelming problems of civil war and severe food shortages.

Furthermore, the possibility that those American radicals who had flocked to Moscow in the early days of the revolution might compensate for the Bolsheviks' lack of information by supplying them with an objective account of the socialist movement in the United States, let alone a favorable description of the SLP, was about nil. By and large, the American radicals in Soviet Russia were either members or ex-members of the anarcho-syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World or the reformist Socialist Party. The SLP had been warring with both groups for years and the mutual hostility carried to Russia.

The one exception to this general condition might have been Boris Reinstein, an SLP member who went to Europe in 1917 as the Party's official representative to an international meeting in Stockholm. Reinstein was also the SLP's representative to the International Socialist Bureau.

In July of 1917, Reinstein went on to Moscow. After the October revolution he worked for the Bolshevik government as chief of the Department of International Revolutionary Propaganda. Though the SLP received only two communications from him during the next several years, the *Weekly People* of January 19, 1918, carried a favorable editorial on the work he was doing.

However, after several years in Russia, Reinstein repudiated the SLP. In subsequent reports, Petersen indicated that he had never been con-

The SLP and the USSR

sidered a “solid” member, in large measure because he had strongly advocated unity with the Socialist Party. Another point brought up was Reinstein’s alleged support for the Mensheviks before the October revolution.

Overall, the SLP’s lack of representation in Moscow combined with other factors to prevent the Party from ever getting a hearing there.

In the summer of 1920, the Party’s programmatic differences with the Communist International crystallized when the Second Congress of the Third International adopted the famous 21 points as conditions for affiliation with it. The 21 points, representing the general orientation and program of the Russian Bolshevik party, were the subject of much debate and discussion within the SLP.

The SLP parted ways with the International on the very first point. That condition held that all member organizations must promote the “dictatorship of the proletariat” as their main program and political slogan.

While the SLP noted that it had no opposition “in principle” to the dictatorship of the proletariat, insofar as it referred to supreme working-class power, it resisted its adoption as the primary political program. In 1920, the dictatorship of the proletariat was widely understood to mean the establishment of a party-state and the adoption of a whole series of “transitional measures” short of socialism. While the SLP conceded the necessity for these steps in less industrialized nations where the proletariat was a minority, it rejected them in the United States.

As the Party saw it, the adoption of the first point would force it to give up its Socialist Industrial Union program and propaganda, the very foundation of its existence and the basis of De Leon’s contribution to socialist theory. Instead of advocating the abolition of the political state and the establishment of a Socialist Industrial Republic, the Party would be required to subordinate its program and its unique De Leonist positions in favor of a single slogan, “the dictatorship of the proletariat.” The Third International made it clear there was no room for anything else under the 21 points.

While the Party agreed that some of the 21 points had validity in the United States, it held that others were applicable only to conditions in Russia and other industrially underdeveloped countries where the proletariat was a minority of the population. Under U.S. conditions they were not only anachronisms but would constitute steps backward for the American working class.

For example, the SLP rejected the International’s position that the class struggle in the United States was “entering upon the phase of civil war” and that it was the duty of Communists “to create everywhere a parallel illegal organization.” Though reaction was on the rise in the United States after the end of World War I, and class struggle was

Socialist Labor Party

intensifying, the SLP held that the country was nowhere near a revolutionary crisis. Furthermore, as long as conditions did not preclude open socialist agitation, the Party was opposed to forming “a parallel illegal organization.” The formation of such an underground party, it said, would not assist it in reaching the working class with its program or in organizing workers into Socialist Industrial Unions.

Other points the SLP took exception to included the provision on socialist work within the trade unions and the military.

With its declaration in 1920 that the anarcho-syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World was the U.S. organization doing the most to build soviets in America and the adoption of the 21 points, the International had taken a direction completely at odds with Socialist Labor Party positions.

Yet the formation of a new International was too important a step for the world socialist movement to be prematurely crossed off the agenda. There was still strong sentiment within the Party for affiliation. This sentiment reflected the fact that Party members saw the struggle for socialism as an international movement. It was the same sentiment that had kept the SLP in the Second International for over two decades despite political disagreements.

II.

Early in 1921, the Party took two significant steps to place its position before the Third International. First, under the date of January 15, 1921, National Secretary Arnold Petersen sent a lengthy letter to Lenin, as premier of Soviet Russia. Then in May the Party's National Executive Committee decided to send two observers to the Congress of the Third International in Moscow. The underlying aim of both of these actions was to seek affiliation with the International.

Petersen's letter to Lenin was fraternal in tone. He hailed the Russian Revolution as a progressive step in the struggle for socialism. “We now firmly believe and congratulate you upon the fact that the Soviet Socialist Republic of Russia is firmly established among the nations of the world, a beacon lighting the way to a new era in human history,” Petersen said. “May your success in solving your tremendous internal problems be as complete as has hitherto been your success in checking your enemies in arms.”

The letter went on to note that the SLP, “upon repeated occasions...officially expressed unqualified satisfaction and endorsement of the launching of the Third International by our Russian comrades...”

However, the primary purpose of the letter was not to compliment the Bolsheviks. It was to present the SLP's case regarding the revolutionary movement in America. The Party believed that Lenin and the Bolsheviks were misinformed on that subject; that they misunderstood

The SLP and the USSR

the roles played by the IWW, the SP, and the newly formed CP in this country. Its objective was to correct that presumed misunderstanding and at the same time to explain why the SLP rejected the tactic of “bor-ing from within” the procapitalist unions and why it opposed the orga-nization of any underground party.

“Let us emphasize,” the letter concluded, “the desire expressed in our Convention (1920) Resolution on the Third International, to appear before that body as applicant for admission in the near future, making clear our revolutionary position and activity. Indeed, there is no doubt that every member of the Party hopes that the SLP may be able to have a delegation at a very early meeting of the Third International.”

The fact that the SLP chose to place its case directly before Lenin reflected the high regard in which he was held within the Party. There was a strong tendency not to place any blame on Lenin for positions taken by the International that conflicted with SLP positions. Instead the Party leveled its criticism of the Third International at the “Zinoviev-Kamenev group.” “While the Zinoviev type of mind may domi-nate the Third International, it is clear that Lenin, at least, remains a realist in most things,” Petersen told the National Executive Committee of the SLP in 1921.

There were several reasons for this attitude toward Lenin. Like the SLP, he had struggled against the reformist currents that swept through the American and European socialist movement around the turn of the century. By the time of the 1917 revolution, his stature as a Marxist theoretician was already established.

The Party was also strongly influenced by reports that Lenin had read De Leon’s works and had been impressed with De Leon’s concept of industrial government.

For example, on May 4, 1918, John Reed, the author of *Ten Days That Shook the World* who had recently returned to the United States from Russia, appeared before the NEC in session. The May 11, 1918 *Weekly People* reported as follows: “Premier Lenin, Reed said, is a great admirer of Daniel De Leon, considering him the greatest of modern Socialists—the only one who has added anything to socialist thought since Marx....”

And the *Weekly People* continued: “It is Lenin’s opinion, Reed said, that the industrial state as conceived by De Leon will ultimately have to be the form of government in Russia....”

Lenin’s reported tributes to De Leon were considered to have great propa-ganda value for the Party. They directed attention to the SLP and no doubt were expected to add to both De Leon’s and the Party’s pre-s-tige.

But while there is ample reason to believe that Lenin was acquaint-ed with some of De Leon’s work, the reliability of Reed’s report has since

Socialist Labor Party

been questioned. For example, Theodore Draper, in his 1957 book, *The Roots of American Communism*, implies that it was deliberately colored. According to Draper, "When John Reed came back from Russia in 1918, he tried to win over the SLP by telling it that Lenin was practically a disciple of De Leon."

Statements such as Reed's led the SLP to exaggerate the influence of De Leonism abroad. For example, in a resolution adopted by the 1920 National Convention, the Party stated, "From several countries there have been indications that the SLP and De Leon are playing a greater role in social reconstruction than is generally admitted. In Russia we know that Lenin has acknowledged De Leon as the one Socialist that has really contributed to the science of socialism since Marx. Lenin has publicly repeatedly acknowledged his debt to the genius of our great Daniel De Leon."

Although the SLP accepted Reed's report, and several similar ones, in good faith, as it turned out they vastly overstated De Leon's influence on Lenin's thinking and policies. The result was a certain contradictory attitude toward Lenin on the part of the SLP which was typified in Petersen's 1926 report to the NEC:

"Through one of those strange contradictions which sometimes defy analysis, the foremost leader of the Russian Revolution, Nicolai Lenin, at one moment gives almost unqualified approval to the foremost Marxian Socialist of modern times, Daniel De Leon, and yet, the very next moment, so to speak, endorses the very elements, principles, and tactics which constitute the antithesis to De Leonism and De Leon's work."

Although Petersen's January letter to Lenin led to no tangible results, in May the Party decided to send a delegation of two Party members to Moscow to attend the 1921 Congress of the Third International as observers and, if possible, spokespersons.

As outlined in Petersen's report to the 1921 NEC Session, the function of the SLP delegation "should be to present our program to the Third International; to explain our principles and tactics to our comrades abroad, and to prove the absolute justification, aye, necessity of our position in view of the social and historical, economic, and political lay of the land in the United States."

Since the SLP had no direct contact with the Third International, the two Party representatives, John D. Goerke and Samuel Smiley, faced a formidable task just getting to Moscow. In June of 1921, Goerke and Smiley finally reached Moscow via Stockholm and a dangerous voyage across the Baltic Sea to Kronstadt. They were assisted through the Allied blockade of Russia by Communists. Later they reported on the courteous treatment given them by the Bolsheviks.

On arriving in Moscow the two SLP members learned that they could

The SLP and the USSR

not expect to be recognized as delegates to the International. In their report to the Party after their return to New York, they said Boris Reinstein had informed them that “our opponents as a unit refused to sit in the Congress with representatives of an organization that was an enemy to the American branch of the Communist International and that we could not expect recognition of any kind.” But since there were no personal objections to the two men, the International gave them guest cards so they could observe the proceedings.

Goerke and Smiley were able to confirm many of the impressions already held by the Party. They found that the Third International, as a body, had no comprehension of conditions in America, and that there was no basis for thinking that the International might look favorably on the Party’s program of Socialist Industrial Unionism.

According to their report, “The position of the SLP upon the question of industrial unionism, that is, to familiarize the working class with the necessity of organizing the workers in the industries at the present time, so that they may be prepared to operate the industries in the future, is not considered by the Third International except to reject it as an absurdity.”

They also brought back confirmation of the Third International’s direct intervention in the movement in America. “We learned,” Goerke and Smiley reported, “that the Communist Party of the U.S.A. did not evolve and develop of its own volition....” Rather, the creation of the CPUSA “was directed from Moscow by the Third International, with John Reed as its commissioned representative.” They learned, too, that the CPUSA was “financed from Russia” and that if the SLP had been recognized as “the leader of the movement” in the United States, it would have received heavy financial backing from the International.

Another aspect of Goerke and Smiley’s visit was their perception of programmatic differences between the SLP and Bolshevism. The SLP was among the first to see the seeds of a “party dictatorship” in the Bolshevik program, and much of the information reported by its two representatives confirmed this.

The Bolshevik position, as Goerke and Smiley described it in their report, was that only a small minority of the proletariat could possibly rise above bourgeois ideals and concepts. The SLP representatives gave the Bolshevik program as follows:

“It then becomes the duty of the intellectually advanced minority of the proletariat to be organized into a Communist Party, with a highly centralized form of organization, controlling itself with self-imposed rigid, iron discipline, and become the leader of that mass. Within the party there must be developed highly trained, keenly intellectual leaders capable at all times to take advantage of strategic moments and positions, able to avoid all pitfalls and possible dangers; thusly

Socialist Labor Party

equipped overthrow the political rule of the bourgeoisie and inaugurate the dictatorship of the proletariat which then, by the logic of things, becomes the dictatorship of the organized intelligent minority of that class, i.e., of the Communist Party....The proletariat must be protected against itself by its own dictatorship to prevent the bourgeoisie to seek recruits within this mass for counterrevolutionary plots.”

Despite its disagreements with this program, the SLP continued to support the Soviet Union as a country “building socialism.” But it was highly critical of its international policy and particularly of the Third International. In a resolution adopted at the Party’s 1924 National Convention, it charged that the International had done “incalculable” harm to the revolutionary movement in the United States.

In the resolution (published in 1926 under the title *The SLP and the Third International*), the Party told the Bolsheviks: “Keep your hands off the revolutionary movement in America.” And while it granted that the Third International “deserves credit” for having helped the Soviet government survive in the early years after the revolution, it summed up the SLP’s view as follows:

“From no conceivable angle of vision can the course pursued by the Third International in England, Germany, France, Italy, to say nothing of the smaller European countries, be considered as having been helpful to Soviet Russia in the sense of aiding in her first and foremost task, the upbuilding of Russian industry; on the contrary, that course has all along made more difficult and often frustrated the constructive efforts of Soviet diplomacy to that end.

“And from no conceivable angle of vision have the activities of the Third International been helpful to the revolutionary socialist movement of the world; on the contrary, they have created confusion, disappointment, disintegration, apathy, alienated the spontaneous sympathy of millions, created doubt of the sanity if not the good will of those who directed these activities, and brought about a situation it will take years of hard work to overcome.”

Stalin, the Purges and World War II

I.

Despite growing disillusionment with the policies of the Third International, the Socialist Labor Party continued to give critical support to the Soviet Union throughout the twenties and into the thirties. During that period, the Party held that although the U.S.S.R. was not yet a socialist country, the Bolshevik government was in the process of laying the material foundation necessary for a socialist society. The Party further held that, while this foundation was being built, conflicts within the Communist leadership and between it and the essentially conservative peasantry were not only to be expected, but were unavoidable. The expectations were that as industrial development and signs of an emerging socialist society began to appear, these contradictions would become less acute.

Thus, during the twenties and thirties, the Party closely watched Soviet efforts to modernize the country. Periodically, articles would appear in the *Weekly People* telling of steady progress in increasing production levels, curbing illiteracy and raising the general cultural level of the peasants and workers out of the semifeudal state in which czarism had kept them.

As late as 1936, in a resolution adopted at its National Convention, the SLP reaffirmed “its often expressed approbation and admiration of the great work of socialist reconstruction in Russia, the gigantic steps taken in lifting that vast country of erstwhile reaction and degradation out of the feudo-capitalist darkness toward socialist enlightenment....”

Of course, Soviet Russia’s path to socialism could not be dictated from outside the country, any more than socialist tactics and strategy in a technologically advanced nation could be dictated by Communist leaders in Moscow. The SLP, therefore, tended to take a “hands off” attitude toward Soviet internal policy, trying to understand it in the context of conditions existing within the Soviet Union. This is not to say that the Party was entirely uncritical of Soviet internal policies. But its main criticisms were directed at Soviet foreign policy.

In 1935, Stalin adopted a policy of collaboration with capitalist elements ostensibly to fight the rising reactionary tide in the West. Soviet-

Socialist Labor Party

subsidized organizations were directed by Moscow to form united fronts with capitalist organizations and parties for the purpose of saving the “remnants of bourgeois democracy.”

The SLP condemned Stalin’s united front strategy not only as another opportunistic effort to manipulate the workers of other countries in accordance with the Soviet Union’s devious foreign policy, but as an outright betrayal of the principle of class struggle.

From that time on, the SLP began to take an increasingly critical attitude toward the Soviet Union, including its internal policies. It began to question whether Soviet Russia was indeed building socialism. To the SLP, socialism meant an industrial form of government based on the revolutionary industrial organizations of the workers—a government through which the workers owned, controlled and administered the entire economy. If the U.S.S.R. was indeed building socialism, as it professed, the Party reasoned that the degree of industrial development by the mid-thirties was such that there should be definite signs of a developing industrial administration. There were no such signs.

In fact, in 1936 the Soviet Union adopted a new constitution that strengthened political institutions and Communist Party rule. The SLP saw the 1936 constitution as a retrogressive step that set up political forms in Russia similar to the bourgeois parliamentary institutions that exist in capitalist countries. In his report to the Party’s National Executive Committee in 1937, National Secretary Petersen declared that the 1936 Russian constitution, with its “reversion to a political bicameral system of government and its increasing emphasis on political power, pure and simple [was enacted] at the expense of economic or industrial working-class self-government....”

He said that the Stalin-led government had moved to strangle the trade unions. A new Soviet code, he continued, “may be adopted which would put an end to what traditionally is called trade unionism, but by which is here meant unionism in any form.”

There were additional signs of the SLP’s increasingly critical attitude toward Stalin the following year. The Party began to call attention to the inadequacy of using only the objective criteria of Soviet economic development as a guide to Russia’s advance toward socialism. In the *Weekly People* of January 1, 1938, Petersen wrote, “Although the Russian Communists have succeeded in building up the country industrially, and...at the same time improving the cultural standards (and no doubt the physical condition) of the Russian masses, it must be remembered that merely increasing the productivity of the workers does not constitute socialism, nor even necessarily steps toward socialism—that is, as far as the task and duty of the Marxian revolutionist is concerned. The all-important question is: With all these improvements, is Russia actually moving steadily and consistently toward the classless, no-polit-

The SLP and the USSR

ical-state social system, which we call socialism? (And by socialism is meant what Marx refers to as communism in its highest stage.) One asks this question with many great misgivings, for the evidence at hand indicates that in that respect Soviet Russia is backing away from, rather than marching steadily toward the socialist goal in the fullest Marxian sense.”

Despite the insight these observations reflect, the Party was still reluctant to make the fundamental change in its position toward Soviet Russia. Neither the implications arising from the above-cited observations on the internal situation, nor its critical stance on Stalin’s united front policy were followed to their logical Marxist conclusion. The Party continued its critical support of the Stalinist government until the Nazi-Soviet pact in 1939—an error the Party was forced to confront later on.

In 1940, for example, Petersen wrote in the pamphlet *The Stalinist Corruption of Marxism* that the “SLP has been slow in condemning the Stalin bureaucracy. We have at times leaned backward in our efforts to perceive something that might justify continued recognition of the Stalinist regime as a proletarian regime.”

And again in 1946, in an official Party document, Petersen noted that even after the Soviet bureaucracy had called for a united front, the Party “still hesitated somewhat in drawing the final, the ultimate, conclusions to which the change in Stalinist policy pointed.”

By way of explanation, Petersen added: “The hesitation was...the result of the Party’s reluctance to abandon all hope of Soviet Russia becoming a full-fledged Marxian democracy under its current leadership, despite the mistakes, aye, despite the crimes, committed by that leadership in the name of Marxism. The hesitation...testified to our ardent desire to promote or maintain international solidarity with the workers in all lands, even where we could not agree with policies and programs.”

While that no doubt was a factor, it is inadequate as an explanation for the Party’s prolonged hesitancy to condemn Stalinism. To be sure, there were difficult problems in analyzing Soviet Russia. As Petersen pointed out, one was “at best confronted with the conflicting elements of promise and performance; of supposedly good intentions and their terminal in ‘hell’; of accepted premise, and violation of premise in the name of expediency.”

What was necessary was to cut through the rhetoric and appearances. But this could have been done only if the Party had followed up on its initial observations with a more thoroughgoing analysis of the internal situation in Russia—at least as thorough as its analysis of the Third International and Soviet foreign policy. The failure to do so led it to misjudge and rationalize the ruthlessness of the Communist dictatorship, including the mass terror unleashed by Stalin in 1936 and

Socialist Labor Party

1937, which should have provided conclusive evidence that the Soviet government was not a proletarian dictatorship and that Stalin was consolidating a bureaucratic dictatorship over the proletariat.

During 1936 and 1937, Stalin conducted an extensive purge during which a host of prominent members of the Communist Party, including many who held high posts in the government bureaucracy, as well as high-ranking military officers, were eliminated. Bolsheviks who had played a leading role in the revolution were expelled from the party, charged with treason or other crimes against the state, and either executed or sentenced to slave labor camps after mock trials. Leading Bolsheviks, among them Zinoviev, Kamenev, Rykov and Bukharin, were charged with a variety of crimes, tried and executed for supposedly conspiring with Trotsky, who had already been driven into exile, to overthrow the Soviet government.

Though there were many who recognized the purge as a deliberate and brutal suppression of all opposition to Stalin's bureaucratic machine and much evidence pointing that way, the SLP continued to take a sympathetic approach to Soviet internal policy, Stalin's ruthlessness included. As late as March 26, 1938, Arnold Petersen wrote: "The Socialist Labor Party is not unduly impressed with the fact, deplorable as that fact is, of some of the most prominent men in Russia having turned traitors. In our own Party we have had similar experiences, yet the Socialist Labor Party has had no qualms in dealing properly and effectively with traitors and disrupters, no matter whether they held the lowest or the highest posts in the Party...That men go wrong in great causes is a fact too well known to require proof."

And in May 1939, addressing the NEC in session, Petersen declared: "There can be little disagreement that the Russian dictatorship is as ruthless as that of the Nazis. Ruthlessness, however, is not in itself something that Marxists unqualifiedly denounce. The question must be: Ruthlessness as to what, and under what circumstances? If the counter-revolution rears its head, there is but one thing to do: crush it. And no one has yet discovered a way of crushing anything softly and gently...That there was a well-organized conspiracy against Soviet Russia, supported, if not actually directed by foreign reactionary powers (notably Nazi) can no longer be seriously doubted...To expect any government (and particularly an avowedly working-class government) to sit placidly and watch such conspiracies as if they were innocent family quarrels is to expect the impossible...."

Within months after this was written, however, the Party was forced to recognize that those who were purged had not "confessed their crimes freely and unreservedly," that the confessions had been physically and brutally forced from them, and that the trials were the machinations of an antiworking-class dictatorship.

The SLP and the USSR

II.

The stroke which severed the final thread of SLP support for the Soviet government, as mentioned earlier, was the Nazi-Soviet pact in August 1939. It was Stalin's "united front" with Hitler and the cynical propaganda drive rationalizing the alliance, combined with the partitioning of Poland and the Soviet invasion of Finland in the same year, that dispelled any lingering hope the SLP had that Soviet Russia was moving toward socialism. Thereafter the Party condemned Stalinism without reservation as anti-Marxist and an obstacle in the path of the international socialist movement.

In one sense, it was logical that the final break with the U.S.S.R. was precipitated by Soviet foreign policy. The international policy of the Soviet leadership had drawn SLP criticism almost from the time of the revolution. The SLP's opposition to the Third International and its critical evaluation of the U.S.S.R.'s impact on the labor movement in the West paved the way for the Party's ultimate rejection of the Soviet Union for the role it played in world politics and in particular for its counterrevolutionary impact on the international socialist movement.

At the same time, this orientation toward foreign policy had its shortcomings, for it reflected a lack of systematic attention to the internal development of the U.S.S.R. which had produced those policies. The evolution of the U.S.S.R. had raised serious doubts as to the true nature of the social system there emerging. But because the SLP had paid less attention to Russia's internal than to its external policies, it confronted serious obstacles to analyzing the Soviet system once it realized that whatever the U.S.S.R. was building, it wasn't building socialism.

The SLP's denunciation of the "corrupting alliance" between Hitler and Stalin was aimed especially at the hypocritical propaganda which accompanied the pact from Moscow. It was not simply that the U.S.S.R. had associated with the fascist powers, but that it presented its expedient, contradictory maneuvers as the height of "scientific socialism" and justified them with the most tortured fabrications.

On September 9, 1939, the *Weekly People* editorially declared: "The crime of the Soviet Union lies not in remaining out of the imperialist war, but in its gratuitous betrayal of the workers still in bondage to capitalism. And this was accomplished, not so much through the signing of a Soviet-Nazi pact, as in its ruthless duplicity which even now manifests itself in the absurd, hastily concocted explanations of the Stalinist." It concluded that the U.S.S.R. had "dealt in deception, pantomime and double sense. It has violated every canon of the proletarian revolution."

Before the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact, the Stalinist bureaucracy's foreign policy and international tactics and strategy were shaped by its desire to forge an alliance with the Western capitalist powers. Accord-

Socialist Labor Party

ingly, it had originally branded Nazi Germany the aggressor and France and Great Britain nonaggressors. But after the pact, it made a complete reversal in its “analysis.” For example, Tass, the Soviet news agency, brazenly declared, “It was not Germany who attacked France and England, but France and England who attacked Germany, assuming responsibility for the war.” (November 29, 1939)

The SLP did not, as some did, criticize the U.S.S.R. on the dubious grounds that it had violated the rules of the imperialist game by switching alliances. Rather it stressed that as a professed socialist nation and the supposed leader of the world Marxist movement, Soviet policy and propaganda had a special obligation to the working class.

If extenuating circumstances compelled it to form an alliance with a capitalist power, the Party said, a real proletarian government would provide a forthright explanation that would make for “international working-class enlightenment.” It would not deal in double talk or treachery. But Stalin did not follow such a course. The result was that the entire world socialist movement suffered a setback when Soviet Russia, acting in the name of Marxism, made common cause with the Nazis and joined in the practice of invading other nations and slaughtering workers in neighboring countries.

In the fall of 1939, Stalin attempted to justify the Soviet invasion of Finland with the claim that Russian troops were “liberating” Finnish workers from their capitalist masters. The SLP exposed this self-serving sophistry. It noted that the Soviet Union’s unprincipled aggression inevitably would have a negative impact on “that mass of nonclassconscious workers.” The sound of Russian guns would only drive Finnish workers into the arms of the exploiting class, it said.

On December 9, 1939, the *Weekly People* categorically denounced Stalin’s crude attempt to justify the invasion of Finland as an act of liberation. The Stalinist claim, it noted, was in complete contradiction to the elementary Marxist principle that the “liberation of a nation’s oppressed class must proceed from within.”

By early 1940, no semblance of the Party’s former attitude of sympathy and hope with regard to Soviet Russia remained. It had changed to one of utter disapproval and censure of the Stalinist bureaucracy. On February 3, 1940, National Secretary Arnold Petersen wrote in the *Weekly People*: “The action of Soviet Russia, from socialist premises, constitutes an indictment so damning as to remove any lingering doubt one might have entertained with respect to the quantity and quality of Marxism possessed by Stalin & Co.”

Later the same year, the SLP’s National Convention formally withdrew its “heretofore extended recognition of the present regime in Soviet Russia as Marxist...”

In recognizing the anti-Marxist character of the Stalinist bureaucra-

The SLP and the USSR

cy, the SLP clearly moved in the right direction. Yet, as noted earlier, it did so primarily on the basis of its reaction to a series of actions taken by the Soviet government on the international field. And it judged those actions primarily from the perspective of their effect on the American socialist movement.

In arriving at a new policy toward the U.S.S.R. on the basis of its conduct on the international field, the Party did not simultaneously undertake a full examination of the internal structure and the government of Soviet society. If the U.S.S.R. could no longer be viewed as a country “building socialism,” then what sort of society was emerging, and what were its implications for the socialist movement and the workers of the world?

In part the Party did try to make a new assessment by returning to basic socialist principles. It reaffirmed that a society marked by the existence of the political state, class divisions and the wages system could in no sense be considered socialist. It used these “touchstones” to distinguish Soviet society from the Socialist Republic it sought to bring into existence in the United States and elsewhere, and it distanced itself thoroughly from all conceptions of socialism based on the Soviet model.

But this in itself did not explain what the Soviet Union was, only what it was not. The Party continued to hold that “Soviet Russia is not, in any normal or proper capitalist sense, a capitalist nation.” Neither private ownership of the means of production nor the usual mechanisms of a capitalist economy could be found in the U.S.S.R.

Instead, the SLP began to describe the Soviet Union as a “bureaucratic state despotism,” a new form of class society in which a privileged class of bureaucrats, by virtue of their control of the state, controlled the economy and exploited the masses of workers and peasants. This characterization formed the basis of the SLP’s analysis for the next several decades. The Party placed itself in opposition to both capitalism and bureaucratic statism and advanced its revolutionary program of Socialist Industrial Unionism as the alternative to both.

Despite the essential validity of the bureaucratic statist analysis, however, it did not receive the necessary explication and expansion. It was used almost as a shorthand to distinguish the SLP from those proposing Soviet-style socialism. But it was not adequately backed up by an extensive discussion of the historic implications of the rise of this new form of class rule, nor by a detailed presentation of the social anatomy and political economy of the Soviet bloc nations. This left certain unresolved questions about the U.S.S.R. which are still being considered to this day. (See the New York Labor News publication, *The Nature of Soviet Society*.)

Nevertheless, there is a common thread in the history of the SLP’s

Socialist Labor Party

attitude toward the Soviet Union which reflects the Party's unshaken commitment to genuine Marxist socialism. From its initial refusal to uncritically adopt Leninism and dissolve into the Bolshevized Third International, to its break with the counterrevolutionary foreign policy of the U.S.S.R., to its refusal to acknowledge the bureaucratized societies as "socialist" or "transitional" regimes, the SLP has been guided by a firm understanding that only conscious revolutionary action by the workers of each country can bring into being the classless, stateless democracy of socialism. Whatever gaps or errors may be found in the history of its attitudes toward the U.S.S.R., the SLP's consistent adherence to the basic principles of what socialism is and how it must be achieved kept it on its original course as a party of revolutionary socialism.

Appendix: De Leon and the 1905 Revolution

Daniel De Leon did not live to see the October revolution of 1917, but he did witness the “dress rehearsal” of 1905 and in fact followed it closely at the height of his socialist career. The story of his response sheds considerable light on De Leon’s insight as a Marxist and his internationalist perspective.

Russia had always occupied something of a special place in the minds of Marxist theoreticians, dating back to the founders of socialist science themselves. In the mid-1800s, Marx and Engels viewed czarist Russia as an ominous bastion of reaction that threatened the rising democratic revolutions in Europe, particularly in Germany. But with the movement of the Russian serfs and their eventual emancipation in 1861, they began to see the beginnings of revolutionary developments in the vast czarist empire which would have a profound impact on the entire world.

Marx stressed three factors bearing on Russia’s potential revolutionary future which, in hindsight, are extremely interesting. First, because of the nature of Russia’s village communes and relative absence of any capitalist development up to that point, Marx thought Russia had “the finest chance ever offered by history to a nation” to avoid “the fatal vicissitudes of the capitalist regime.” (*Selected Correspondence*) The two keys needed to open up this possibility, he added, were some sort of military defeat for czarism and the spread of workers’ revolutions in the capitalist nations.

In an 1882 preface to the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels summed up this perspective, writing: “If the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for the workers’ revolution in the West, so that one supplements the other, then the present form of land ownership in Russia may be the starting point of an historical development.”

During Marx and Engels’ lifetimes, this combination of factors did not materialize. Instead, capitalism developed rapidly in Russia in the last decades of the 19th century, breaking up the village communes and transforming Russia’s social landscape. But this only fed the buildup of revolutionary pressures in the czarist empire, and left it to the next generation to witness the explosion.

Socialist Labor Party

One of the leading Socialists of that next generation was Daniel De Leon, who turned his attention to Russia shortly after assuming the editorship of the *Weekly People* in the United States. De Leon had joined the Socialist Labor Party late in 1889 and took over the Editor's post in 1891. A few months later, on February 14, 1892, De Leon drew the following picture of the czar's domain:

"That a great revolution has not broken out in Russia seems almost incomprehensible...To the student of history, the present situation in Russia bears a striking resemblance to the internal conditions in France in 1789. Both present to his view an exhausted nation, an obstinate monarchy, a corrupt nobility, an aspiring middle class, a pauperized peasantry, and a starving proletariat."

But De Leon quickly cautioned against expecting history to repeat itself. "External influences, especially," he wrote, "are very different now, on the eve of the Russian cataclysm, from what they were at the beginning of the French Revolution."

One of those external influences was the dominance of the bourgeoisie throughout Europe. This meant that most of the foreign powers were hostile to the feudal czarist monarchy and favorable to their own counterparts, the Russian bourgeoisie.

At the same time, however, De Leon cited other "external influences" working *against* the emergence of a strictly bourgeois revolution in Russia. These were the growing proletariat and the rise of modern socialism. As De Leon put it:

"In France, the proletariat followed the bourgeoisie and fought the battles which finally enthroned the latter, while leaving the former in political dependence and economic servitude. It remains to be seen if the ignorant masses of Russia, in the light that may be brought to them by modern socialism, can do better than did the French proletariat when it was just as ignorant and had not the same light to guide it."

De Leon's suggestion, made here as early as 1892, that the rise of a socialist proletariat could possibly transform the nature of the coming Russian Revolution, anticipates the views put forth in much greater detail by Lenin and Trotsky in Russia itself. The idea that the working class might not follow the bourgeoisie, but would take its own independent leading role was a key to understanding the Russia situation.

De Leon, of course, did not develop these ideas to anywhere near the degree that was done in Russia. This was understandable. In analyzing Russia, De Leon was dealing with a matter that was for him of secondary, though still important, concern. He was not addressing the crucial tasks of his own revolutionary movement which, after all, was developing in a country where the bourgeois revolution had been completed a century earlier.

Nevertheless, De Leon's insight into the potential proletarian char-

The SLP and the USSR

acter of the Russian revolutionary struggle is significant. It continued to influence his thinking as the events leading to 1905 began to unfold.

The forerunner of the 1905 revolution was the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05. This proved to be the military defeat that would rock czarism and contribute to the development of a revolutionary situation. De Leon recognized it as such as soon as the war began.

In “The War in the Far East” (*Daily People*, February 10, 1904), De Leon wrote, “On the whole, it may be said that, as to Russia, the war will ultimately redound to its peoples’ favor, whether it wins or loses; in either case, although more so if it loses, the war will contribute in waking up the masses from their torpor.”

The war had precisely that effect. By the beginning of 1905 Russia saw massive protests, strikes and demonstrations from all the oppressed sectors of society. Economic battles were leading to more generalized political struggles against the monarchy and the demand for democratic rights.

On January 22, tens of thousands of Russian workers marched to the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg to ask the czar for better conditions and basic rights. It was a peaceful march which did not directly threaten the throne or demand its overthrow. Yet the czar’s troops responded by massacring the unarmed demonstrators, killing some 500 and wounding thousands. The day went down in history as “Bloody Sunday” and the impetus toward revolution grew. In De Leon’s words, it was the kind of atrocity that turns the “oppressor himself into a midwife for the revolution.”

Over the next 10 months, the proletariat organized and the revolt simmered. By fall the explosion was imminent. In late September, printing workers in Moscow called a strike, and were joined within days by their counterparts in St. Petersburg. Soon railroad workers, postal employees, bank clerks, students, factory workers and others joined in a general strike that spread throughout Russia and paralyzed the economy and the government.

Strike committees were formed and, in St. Petersburg and Moscow, they developed into the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies. These nonparty bodies were highly authoritative organizations of workers’ delegates binding the proletariat together. They arose in response to the practical needs of the workers’ struggle and united them on the basis of their strength in production. In their brief 50-day history, the soviets wrote a historic chapter on the proletariat’s capacity for revolutionary organization.

Led by the soviets, the Russian workers waged disciplined general strikes in October and November and won major concessions from the czar. The regime attempted to defuse the rebellion with a promise to convene a representative parliament, the Duma. This concession satis-

Socialist Labor Party

fied some of the liberal bourgeois elements engaged in the revolt, but the working class pressed on for the complete overthrow of the monarchy. In November and December the revolutionary battle approached its climax.

In the United States, De Leon might with considerable justification have found himself preoccupied with other matters. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) had just been formed in June, De Leon playing a leading role. He had recently completed his landmark address, now known as *Socialist Reconstruction of Society*, while on tour following the IWW convention. After returning to the East, he appeared on the same platform with Eugene V. Debs in a number of meetings to build support for the new organization. In addition, the New Jersey Conference on Unity between the Socialist Party (SP) and the SLP was convened in December.

These and many other tasks demanded De Leon's attention. Yet throughout this period he kept close watch on Russian events. At the height of the struggle, December 10, 1905, he wrote an editorial entitled, "Is It To Be?" underscoring the importance of the Russian uprising.

"We know of no more significant symptom in the long list of frequent symptoms," he began, "that have been crowding upon one another's heels during the last 12 months and have been thrilling the heart of mankind," than the reports on the Russian events.

De Leon went on to emphasize three aspects of the revolution: first, the fact that it was heading toward more than a capitalist regime; second, the prospect that its success would give a revolutionary impetus to the West; third, the importance of the proletariat's "extra-parliamentary power," an obvious reference to the soviets.

Referring to reports from Europe reprinted in the *Daily People*, De Leon wrote:

"The possibility of the overthrow of the Romanoff dynasty, including [Premier] Witte, which would mean infinitely more than the mere establishment of a bourgeois government, is there discussed, not as a remote, but as an imminent contingency; the circumstance that such a revolution will leap over the Russian frontier into Germany, and roll westward, is there considered...finally, the recognition of the extra-parliamentary power of organized labor, revolutionarily directed—these are utterances of an importance that is excelled by no event of the many important ones that have been recently occurring the world over."

De Leon realized that the possibility of a workers' revolution succeeding first in Russia was one which would upset traditional conceptions, including his own. Yet he had no difficulty adjusting his ideas to reality.

"The theory hitherto has been that the social revolution would break out first in the most capitalistically developed nations, and then pull up

The SLP and the USSR

the others. Was there a flaw in this theory? Are facts about to be produced to reverse the theory, and show that the impulse is to come from the opposite direction? Is it to be?"

"Whether it is to be or not," De Leon wrote, answering his own question, the duty of Socialists was "to get ready, either to give the correct impulse eastward, or to utilize and not to muffle the impulse that may soon be traveling westward. In either event, the working class of America must be up and doing."

In immediate practical terms, this position meant mobilizing support for the Russian workers. On December 17, the *Daily People* printed a declaration from the International Socialist Bureau calling for a worldwide series of demonstrations on behalf of the Russian proletariat to be held on January 22, 1906, the first anniversary of Bloody Sunday.

In conjunction with the IWW, and in some areas the SP, the SLP sponsored mass meetings in over 25 cities "in aid and support of the working class of Russia now on the firing line in the struggle against international despotism." The SLP also established a Russian Revolutionists Fund to raise money to be sent overseas.

At a large rally in New York, several SLP speakers took the platform. James Hunter, the first, underlined the significance of the international protests:

"The argument has been made against socialism that if it is established in America, the powers of Europe will march in and smash it up. The working class of the world, by their chain of prorevolutionary demonstrations around the civilized world tonight, are showing the rulers of the world that, should any such march on a Socialist Republic be planned, they will find themselves powerless before an organized revolt of their own proletariat."

De Leon also addressed the meeting. His speech was influenced by the knowledge that, by the end of January, the workers in Russia had been beaten back by the czar's army, and the revolutionary tide was receding. He chose to stress the inevitability of its future success:

"The Russian government is now saying, 'The revolution is dead.' So spoke the court of Louis XVI, the sycophants of Charles I and the proslavery copperheads. But before they were through with their rejoicings, their respective revolutions overwhelmed them. So will the present revolution go on, to the abolition of tyranny." Though De Leon did not live to see it, his prediction came true 12 years later when Czar Nicholas II proved unable to survive the second Russian Revolution.

In the months and years following the 1905 revolution, De Leon continued to follow Russian events. He took special interest in the attitude of the Russian Socialists toward participation in the Duma and the ways in which Russia's Social Democrats used the parliament for socialist propaganda.

Socialist Labor Party

But for the most part, a period of reaction set in after 1905 which the Russian proletariat did not thoroughly shake off until the catastrophe of World War I and the revolution of 1917—three years after De Leon's death. The period of rich revolutionary lessons had passed.

In light of De Leon's response to the 1905 events, it is almost irresistible to speculate on what his reaction would have been to the 1917 revolution. His history suggests overwhelmingly that he would have been guided by proletarian internationalism and a realization of the political obligation of Western Socialists to utilize to the fullest any revolutionary impulse emanating from Russia. De Leon would likely also have supported the Bolshevik break with the Second International. In fact, he was one of the first to see the seeds of disaster in the reformism of its dominant parties.

It is, of course, impossible to say how he would have analyzed the failure of the Russian Revolution to spread, its consequent isolation and its bureaucratic outcome. Such developments were in no way anticipated in the 1905 uprising or in anything that occurred during De Leon's life. What can be safely said is that, as America's leading Socialist theoretician, De Leon would have been well equipped to draw the lessons of 1917, just as he was to read the events of 1905.