2 Socialism in the United States

What I have presented in the preceding pages was definitely not intended to describe the American economy (I hope to find the opportunity for this in later studies), and even less was it intended to depict American civilisation: furthermore, I never had any intention of giving a full portrayal of the American national character. Of course, much broader foundations would be needed for all those matters. In fact, the only purpose of those lines was to show circumstantial evidence of the existence in the United States of capitalism in an extraordinarily highly developed state. I hope that this is now regarded as having been demonstrated successfully, even if the 'sympathetic reader' has not been ready to follow me on all the digressions.

Quite the contrary, this evidence is merely meant to serve as the starting point for some observations that I want to make on the American proletariat. We know that the position of the wage-labouring class is conditioned by the character of capitalist growth and in particular we have learned both that all social movements have their origin in the situation created by capitalism, and also that modern Socialism is only a response to capitalism. We should therefore obviously start from a consideration of the economic situation if we want to obtain an explanation of the mode of existence of the proletariat in any country. However, this procedure proves itself especially fruitful in the case of the United States. That is to say, in this way we arrive most easily at a clear statement of the problem and are thus saved from the risk of writing without a plan on everything and anything. Let us then proceed.

If, as I have myself always maintained and often stated, modern Socialism follows as a necessary reaction to capitalism, the country with the most advanced capitalist development, namely the United States, would at the same time be the one providing the classic case of Socialism, and its working class would be supporters of the most radical of Socialist movements. However, one hears just the opposite of this asserted from all sides and in all sorts of tones (of complaint if by Socialists, of exultation if spoken by their opponents); it is said that there is absolutely no Socialism among the American working class and that those who in America pass as Socialists are a few broken-down Germans without any following. In fact, an assertion of this kind
cannot fail to awaken our most active interest, for here at last is a
country with no Socialism, despite its having the most advanced
capitalist development. The doctrine of the inevitable Socialist future
is refuted by the facts. For the social theorist as well as for the social
legislator nothing can be more important than to get to the root of
this phenomenon.

To begin with, we must ask whether the statement that there is no
Socialism in the United States, especially no American Socialism, is
actually correct. Now, if taken as absolutely as that, it is undoubtedly
false.

First of all, there is one or, more precisely, there are two social-
democratic parties, in the sense understood throughout continental
Europe, that are by no means supported only by Germans. At the Unity
Convention of the Socialist Party at Indianapolis in 1901 only twenty-
five of 124 delegates, i.e., about 20 per cent, were foreign-born. 31 At the
last Presidential election this party achieved 403,338 votes, 32 to which
are to be added perhaps 50,000 votes for the Socialist Labor Party.
Thus, in the United States in 1904 there were about as many social-
democratic votes cast as in Germany in 1878, 33 or as were cast for the
Freisinnige Vereinigung [Liberal Alliance] and the Anti-Semites to-
gether in the last election for the Reichstag. 34 However, this figure of
the Socialist votes in America undoubtedly represents a minimum of the
workers with Socialist sympathies, the reasons for which will be given
later. Contrary to the situation in Germany, the number of such
workers is considerably greater than the votes cast in elections.

What cannot be denied, however, is that the assertion that the
American working class does not embrace Socialism is largely true.

This is the primary significance of the election statistics just quoted.
One may add considerably to these figures in order to obtain the actual
number of Socialists, but even so one will still be dealing with a
disappearing minority. The votes cast for the Socialist Presidential
candidate in 1904 amount to about 2.5 per cent of the total number of
votes, and moreover that is the result of only the most recent election.
In the 1900 election the Socialist Party achieved only 98,417 votes.
Added to this is the fact that these Socialist votes are by no means
stable. They fluctuate quite considerably from one year to another, as is
evident from the following examples. Votes cast for certain candidacies
of the Socialist Party are shown in Table 1. 35

I shall also try later to give an explanation for the quite remarkable
phenomenon of the unpredictable rising and falling of these election
figures. For the time being it need only be pointed out, in order to
show on what weak foundations the Socialist Party in the United States
rests at the moment, even where it has already gained ground.

However, the conclusion suggested by the election figures is now
confirmed as being correct by a series of indubitable supporting facts.