

Disintegration in Belgian S. P.

By BERTRAM D. WOLFE

THE powerful Belgian Socialist Party, which for its size can boast as large a collection of cabinet ministers as any Socialist Party in the world, is beginning to crack as its continued support of capitalist governments makes it more and more unpopular with the Belgian working class. Its leader, Emile Vandervelde, the revisionist, who long before the war had "discovered" that Marxism was "out of date" and who during the war and post-war period was his majesty's minister in various cabinets and even prime minister for a time, is at present part of a coalition government in which the capitalist parties have a majority of the ministers.

The Belgian masses, who for a long time followed Vandervelde blindly as a result of his promises that the working class of Belgium would get some definite advantages out of his participation in various cabinets, find their lot slowly worsening instead of getting better. Consequently, they are beginning to desert the Socialist Party and, at the same time, an opposition, or left wing movement, is growing up within that organization. The man who has succeeded in putting himself at the head of the opposition for the moment is De Brouckere, (an old time "orthodox Marxist" of the Kautskian school). He is playing the game of left leader to prevent the opposition movement from going too far to the left and his real attitude is revealed by the fact that he has been and still continues to be a delegate from Belgium to the League of Nations, and thus participates in the super-government of imperialism. Nevertheless, he sounded the warning at the special congress of the Belgian Labor Party in Brussels recently to the effect that further participation in the coalition government would result in the disintegration of the party. He declared that the party and the parliament, in which its deputies make up the largest single party bloc, had capitulated before the bankers who are the real masters of Belgium. He felt that all the Socialist Parties of Europe were standing at the crossroads, that if they continued on the path of cooperation with capitalist governments and coalition ministries, they would be completely swallowed up in the capitalist system and will have ceased to represent the interests of labor and its struggle for emancipation. "I have confidence in the triumph of Socialism," he ended, "and if you make

a mistake the torch will fall from your hands and others will raise it again."

But Vandervelde, the seasoned capitalist cabinet minister and real leader of the party, is not easily to be frightened by such warnings. Capitalism still requires his support to carry through the stabilization of the Belgian franc and the rationalization of Belgian industry at the expense of the Belgian working class. He boasted of the achievements of himself and his party in helping capitalism to survive the storm which it had raised among the masses through its policy of plunging the world into war. He boasted of the stabilization of the Belgian franc. He boasted that the participation of himself and his party had aided in the stabilization of capitalism, which in simpler English means that he had made capitalism more secure. He declared that he was not only afraid of a government more to the right of the present one, but also of a government more to the left! Either of these would endanger stabilization. He was supported by the

yellow trade union leaders and the conference finally authorized the executive to draft a legislative program on the basis of further participation in the capitalist government by socialist ministers, this program to go to a referendum.

In the meanwhile, the opposition within the Belgian Labor Party grows and the support of the Communist Party by the working masses grows also. The Belgian Communist Party, which since its inception has been very small, and, thanks to the continued belief of the masses in the leadership of Vandervelde and the Belgian Labor Party, was till recently comparatively without great mass influence, has been growing very rapidly. The repeated failure of the socialists in the Vandervelde coalition government to fight for the most elementary interests of the masses, the complete capitulation of the Poulet-Vandervelde coalition cabinet before the attacks of high finance, the formation of a bankers' government with the support and participation of the social-democratic leaders, the abandonment of a proposed capital levy on the rich and the substitute of a 50 per cent increase in the taxes hitting the masses, the recognition of the American debt, the handing over of the government-owned railroads to a private company—such is the kind of socialism that the Vandervelde coalition policy has given to the Belgian workers.

In October 1925, the Communists participated for the first time in municipal elections (municipal elections are held in Belgium every six years). The party, which is numerically and financially weak, was able to put forth candidates in only 63 municipalities, which municipalities embrace only 28 per cent of the total electorate. The party has only about a thousand members, but it got 70,000 votes and succeeded in electing 26 candidates. In the big industrial cities, the Communist vote varied between 25 and 30 per cent of the social-democratic vote, running in one case as high as 61 per cent. This represents a tremendous advance for the Communists. The Socialist Party during the period in which it acted as the savior of capitalism degenerated so far that it is even incapable of making the about-face that de Brouckere proposes in order to save some shreds of its reputation. The Belgian Labor Party, one of the oldest and best organized reformist parties in Europe is decaying. The future belongs to the Communist Party of Belgium.



Mussolini—"The attempted assassination is due at 12:50 prompt. What shall I wear for it?"

—Simplicissimus, Munich