
Letter to Eugene V. Debs in Terre Haute from Adolph Germer in Chicago, April 18, 1918.

A document in the Eugene V. Debs papers, microfilm edition, reel 2, frames 0472A-0473A.
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Chicago, Ill., April 18, 1918.

Eugene V. Debs,
Terre Haute, Ind.

My dear Gene:—

I just returned from Colorado and found your letter of the 15th inst.† On April 9th [1918] I wrote you as follows:

My dear Gene:—

This morning's mail brought your letter of yesterday and I note with interest what you say about holding a special convention of the Socialist Party to reset our war aims and peace terms.

We have received several suggestions along similar lines and something will have to be done before we open the campaign. While a convention would perhaps be the most advantageous method of getting a new program, the cost of it is prohibitive in view of the fact that we have not yet paid last year's convention expenses. To elect delegates in the regular manner would take from 2 to 3 months so that the convention could not be held until sometime in July.

The National Executive committee will have a meeting the first week in May [1918]. Under the new constitution [of 1917], a conference of State Secretaries is to be held once a year. What I have in mind is to have a joint session of the State Secretaries and the new National Executive committee, which will be composed of 15 members, and let that gathering formulate a program for the period of the war and for the reconstruction era.

I don't think the invasion of Russia will in the end be as fatal to us as it now seems. The other day I was speaking to a comrade who is closely in touch with the Russian situation and he is firmly convinced that the German autocracy is digging its own grave by its treatment towards the Russian government. He says first of all that the further the German army gets into Russia, the more will the German military power be weakened on the Western front. In addition to

this, he contends that while the German autocracy is conquering Russian territory, it is by no means conquering the Russian revolutionary spirit and that with the territorial conquests, the German autocracy also inherits the Russian revolution, which will eventually force its way into Germany and Austria. The more territory Germany conquers, the more soldiers will be needed to keep that territory in check and correspondingly, the more soldiers will be taken from the Western front.

I can subscribe in the main to the program of the Inter-Allied except where they call for a support of the war. In view of what the Democratic Administration has done to the members of the Socialist Party all over the country, and in view of the merciless suppression of the press and the interference with our general propaganda, I don't see how we can consistently support the policy of the Democratic Administration.

It seems that we are all agreed that a restatement should be made of the Socialist Party position but there is difference of opinion as to the best course to pursue. The sentiment created by the German invasion of Russia is in a measure being offset by the Japanese and British invasion of Siberia and of course, here it must be said to the credit of Wilson that he has so far refused to give his approval of that policy. Ramsay MacDonald, in an article published in *Pearson's Magazine* for April [1918], struck the keynote when he said: "If a different government now spoke for England — not a government of surrender, but a government of clearly defined democratic aims, a government ready to seize such openings as Count Czernin gave, and to remove suspicions from the minds of the people of the Central Powers — Europe could have peace." Here MacDonald points out that the people of the Central Empires are just as suspicious of the Allied governments as the people of the Allied governments are suspicious of the governments of the Central Empires. In my opinion we should formulate a policy that will command the confidence of the working classes of all the countries, a policy of clearly defined Democratic aims, and then insist that the Allied governments adopt them as a basis for peace negotiations at the earliest possible moment. If the governments adopt such a policy, then we will have something to get into the war for. If they refuse, we have a right to be suspicious of them and to refuse our support.

†- Neither the Debs letter of April 15, 1918, nor the original of the April 9, 1918, letter by Germer to Debs seem to have survived.

[Victor] Berger is in town this morning and though I talked the matter over briefly with him yesterday, I am to have another conference with him this afternoon.

I will be glad to hear from you further in connection with this all-important matter, for we want the benefit of other comrades' views.

With all good wishes, I am as ever

Fraternally yours,

Adolph Germer,
Executive Secretary.

Evidently like a lot of other mail, this letter has gone astray. I hope it has done some good wherever it went. †

There is a growing feeling in favor of changing the party position. Here and there we receive a letter opposing any radical change but the bulk of the correspondence on the subject, and most of the members with whom I have come into personal contact, favor a change. However, I am not enthusiastic over a convention. We still owe about \$7,000 on last year's convention and the fact that we have not been able to pay the bill will cause a lack of enthusiasm for a convention. I suggested to the National Executive Committee that we advance the date of the joint meeting of State Secretaries and the new National Executive Committee, which is composed of 15 members, to June 1st [1918]. [Seymour] Stedman comments as follows:

"I believe it is advisable to hold a meeting of State Secretaries and the new National Executive Committee, and we should welcome assistance from states which are able to send representatives at their expense. This conference might issue, subject to a referendum, a restatement of the present attitude of the party."

I favor this conference in preference to a convention for three reasons. First, it is a conference that must be held anyhow in accordance with our constitution; second, it will be less expensive than a convention; and third, it can be held at a much earlier date than a convention.

It is quite probable that I will be in Indianapolis on May 5th [1918] when we can talk this matter over in person.

The other day while out in Denver, I met our mutual friend and comrade, Channing Sweet, and I had quite an interesting talk with him. Of course, he inquired about you and when I told him that my information was that your health was rapidly improving, he was very much delighted. He is a great old fellow and I wish we had a million more like him.

With every good wish, I am as ever

Fraternally yours,

Adolph Germer,
Executive Secretary.

AG:EL

P.S. Let me know whether this reaches you.

†- Postal authorities regularly interfered with mail delivery to and from the Socialist Party during the war. The classic example is the case of Victor Berger's *Milwaukee Leader*. Postmaster Burleson completely terminated all first class mail to and from the *Leader*, clearly attempting to starve it out of existence by cutting off mail subscriptions. Despite this extreme and unconstitutional action of the Wilson regime, the paper managed to survive through strong local advertising support and subscriptions for local deliveries.

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