
Adolph the Truth Seeker

by John Keracher

Published in *The Communist* [Chicago: Federation-Michigan Alliance], v. 1, no. 1 (July 19, 1919), pg. 7

Adolph Germer is a big man physically, but otherwise very small. As to the honesty of his opinions and the sincerity of his convictions, there can be no doubt — in fact, he is willing to twist and pervert the facts to defend his honest convictions. I do not think the man is a deliberate liar, or even a stranger to truth, but he certainly is very careless in handling facts.

In the controversy which now rages within the Socialist Party over the expulsion of the Socialist Party of Michigan and the suspension of 7 Language Federations, Adolph goes out of his way to drag into the columns of *The Eye-Opener* and assortment of half-truths, so assembled to “justify” the actions of the National Executive Committee.

All his bellowing and squealing and personal attacks will deceive no thinking person. The whole thing is camouflage to cover up or obscure the fact that *the membership has voted the old gang out of office, and they prefer to split the party rather than give up their control!*

Under the caption “The Left Wing and How it Handles the Truth,” he presumes to be in a position to know the truth about happenings in Michigan, while as a matter of fact his information is decidedly “second hand,” and comes through those who have their own motives in misrepresenting the facts.

A case in point is the publication in *The Eye-Opener* of the following letter from a suspended branch of Local Detroit:

Detroit, Mich., June 6, 1919.

The Socialist Party of the US,
803 W Madison St.,
Chicago, Ill.

Comrades:

We the North East Branch SP (Jewish) were suspended by our Central Committee for the offense of participating in

a protest movement against the pogroms on the Jewish People in Poland. (They have since suspended the other 2 Jewish Branches). We cannot see that we have committed such a terrible crime against the principles of international Socialism by our participation in this anti-pogrom movement as to deserve suspension. You comrades of the National Executive understand well enough that these pogroms are organized by the Polish bourgeoisie with the purpose to suppress the Socialist revolution in Poland by means of pogroms and the spreading of national hate. The Jewish working class are the worst sufferers of these pogroms.

As our Branch wants to be true to the principles of the Socialist Party of the United States, we would like you to advise us whether we are wrong in this guess or not.

We would like to be informed in regard to the suspension of the Michigan Socialist Branches of the party and what steps will be taken with the National Executive.

Yours for Socialism,

The North East Branch, SP.
Resolution Committee, by S. Scott.

Here branches are expelled for participating in a protest against the [pogroms against] the Jews, many of whom are our comrades.

Should some Local, Branch, or individual participate in a protest against such massacres as Ludlow and Holly Grove, they would be fired out of the Socialist Party in Michigan. Who is that despotic?

Can you as a Socialist stand for this?

The above letter and the comment thereon shows how greedily ADOLPH THE TRUTH SEEKER seizes upon a perversion of facts to contrast the injured innocence of the National Executive Committee with the “autocratic” Michigan organization. Germer says that the letter from the Jewish Branch proves beyond any possible question that the National Executive Committee was not mistaken in their interpretation of the No Reform Amendment to the Michigan constitution. Now, even if this letter were truthful, it would still be but a local question and not a case

against a whole state, but the writer or writers of the letter are, like Germer and the NEC, peddlers of half-truths.

The Jewish Branches of Local Detroit were suspended — that much is true. The City Central Committee of Local Detroit elected an investigation committee to look into the matter, but the Jewish delegates to the body stated that their Branches refused to be investigated, claiming that there was nothing to investigate. They pleaded guilty to the verbal charges made by other delegates *that they were protesting against the pogroms in Poland as Jews and not as socialists*. They declared that this was true and that it was their intention to continue to cooperate in the anti-pogrom movement in connection with rabbis, Jewish reformers, Zionists, capitalists, and enemies of the working class in general. Had they separated themselves from these reactionary groups and continued their protests as SOCIALISTS, or even cooperated with other proletarian groups, they would not have been suspended, *but this they refused to do*. They were defiant of all party discipline and made nationalistic speeches, much to the disgust of many of the Jewish delegates present at the meeting.

The amendment to the constitution of the Socialist Party of Michigan was made to take care of just such cases. The referendum vote on the constitutional changes had not yet been tabulated, else they might have been expelled instead of suspended. The City Central Committee of Local Detroit did not act arbitrarily as did the National Executive Committee in expelling the whole state organization for a constitutional change, the referendum vote on which had not been completed.

Germer's remarks to the effect that those who would protest against massacres such as those at Ludlow and Holly Grove would be fired out of the Socialist Party of Michigan are contemptible, to say the least. **"Can you as a Socialist stand for this?"** he asks. That is just the trouble with the methods of the NEC: taking their stand first and investigating afterwards.

• • • • •

This excellent National Secretary goes on to record that "the moment the Michigan Charter was revoked the wires were burned with telegrams from [Alfred] Wagenknecht and [Ludwig] Katterfeld, and Monday morning [May 26, 1919], John Keracher, State Secretary of Michigan, was in Chicago."† You're just one day to previous there, Adolph — it was Tuesday morning [May 27] when I stepped into your office and you seemed surprised and demanded to know who had informed me of the action taken by the National Executive Committee.

It certainly was not the NEC who gave me the information that the Charter of the Socialist Party of Michigan had been revoked. That was not their intention; they wanted to get their campaign of misrepresentation well on the way first. They were somewhat surprised to see me and were unable to answer the simple question I put to them: "Has the Michigan Charter been revoked, and if so, Why?" That clever person, George Goebel, remarked that he though Michigan had not been expelled. After returning from lunch, and having had time to consider the manner of their answer, James Oneal make a drawling speech explaining why the committee had revoked the Michigan Charter. He explained that it was because our state constitution had adopted and submitted to a referendum of the membership certain constitutional amendments and that Michigan had been expelled. The case was closed; their decision was final; there was no provision for an appeal.

Suddenly Germer had an inspiration. He leaned forward and whispered to Oneal, who then began to ask questions for the purpose of gaining information to bolster up the stand they had taken. Under the circumstances I declined to answer his questions.

The expulsion of Michigan necessitated the calling of a special State Emergency Convention, which, despite Germer's assertions to the contrary, was called in the regular manner. The members of the State Executive Committee were notified, as was State Secretary-elect O.C. [Oakley] Johnson and the members of the incoming Executive Committee, who took office July 1st [1919]. These officials, with the exception of

†- The Socialist Party of Michigan was expelled on Saturday, May 24, 1919 — the first day of the SPA's landmark meeting of May 24-30, during which time the 1919 party referendum election was set aside, the Michigan state organization summarily expelled, and 7 Foreign Language Federations suspended from the party. Wagenknecht and Katterfeld were revolutionary socialists on the NEC who were outvoted on these and other matters.

one who did not respond, voted unanimously for the convention, which in turn approved the action taken by myself and the State Executive Committee.

The charge of the worthy Germer that private correspondence was carried on between myself and individuals in Michigan is as false as his other statements. The individuals corresponded with were Local Secretaries, and the garbled question from my letters [made] in attempt to prove that I endeavored to influence the election of delegates to the convention is a cheap trick, characteristic of all the quibbling now indulged in by the NEC in their attempt to justify themselves in the eyes of the membership.

I say quibbling, for that is all it amounts to. This split, which they deliberately precipitated, was inevitable due to the development going on within the party. What difference does it make if the division takes the form of expulsion or withdrawal? Those who desire to participate in real socialist propaganda will send delegates to Chicago on September 1st [1919] to organize the Communist Party of America.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2006. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.