
Foreign Federations.

by David P. Berenberg

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Author is presumed to be the editor of the publication, David P. Berenberg.

Many members of the Socialist Party are totally ignorant of the fact that the foreign federations in the past have dominated the work of the Socialist Party of America. That this is an unhealthy condition has been admitted for a long time by careful students of affairs. So long as the foreign federations were merely propaganda groups which did not pay much attention to the internal affairs of the party, they were harmless, in fact, in a certain sense, useful.

With the coming of the Great War and the revolutions that followed in its trail, certain foreign federations clearly lost sight of the fact that they did not live in Europe, that they had to deal with conditions in the United States of America. Many of them, like the Russian, the Lettish [Latvian], the Hungarian, and the Ukrainian, became inflamed with enthusiasm for the revolution in their own country, and thought that they could create such a revolution in this country, entirely apart from the material conditions existing here. The result of this is to be measured largely in the success, so-called, of the “Left Wing” organization within the Socialist Party, to date.

These federations are made up of people who have had no experience whatsoever in political life at home. Being composed of a disfranchised group, and exercising no suffrage here, they naturally feel that the ballot is a useless scrap of paper, and that

nothing can be accomplished by political action. They are a fertile field for syndicalist and anarchist propaganda. They do not understand American conditions, they do not understand the workings of a political democracy.

It is an absurdity to have an organization of this sort in control. Yet, at the last report of the National Executive Secretary [Adolph Germer], we find that 53 percent of the Socialist Party membership belongs to the Foreign Language Federations. We find also that the membership in these federations has grown 70 percent in the last four months.†

We are face to face with a most serious condition. If the federations remain in the Party, and if they grow as they have grown in the past few weeks, the Socialist Party of America will cease to be an American Party and will become merely an echo of conditions in Europe.

Of late, these language federations have grown particularly arrogant. Seven of them — the Russian, the Ukrainian, the Lettish, the South Slav‡, the Polish, and the Hungarian — have deliberately violated the Constitution of the Socialist Party. They have accepted a platform at variance with the platform of the Socialist Party, they have committed fraud in the elections, and have refused to recognize the right of the National Executive Committee to exercise any control over

†- Germer's May 24, 1919, report to the National Executive Committee appears as a pdf on this website. The URL for this document is: <http://www.marxists.org/parties/spusa/1919/0524-germer-reporttonec.pdf>

‡- Berenberg here misidentifies the “South Slavic” [Yugoslav] Federation, a group comprised primarily of the Slovenian and Croatian nationalities, along with a smattering of Serbs.

them. In their papers, they have vilified and slandered Party officials and certain members of the Party with whom they are not in agreement.

For these offenses, they have been suspended from Party activity. They have, of course, refused to recognize the suspension. Some of the comrades may think that the action of the National Executive Committee in this instance was harsh and undemocratic. Strong measures, however, are needed to preserve the Party. The violation of the Constitution on the part of these organizations was open and admitted. The Party membership will have an opportunity in a special convention to ratify or to overrule the action of its National Executive Committee. In the meantime, the harmful work of these federations had to be stopped, for the good of the party.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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