
Letter to the Editor of the *New York Call* [June 17, 1919]

by Irvin D. Cline

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Editor of *The Call*:

I cannot too strongly express my indignation at the action of our national, state, and Local New York officials in suspending or expelling Socialist organizations because of the Left Wing controversy. It certainly is a fine state of affairs when our National Executive Committee suspends about 25,000 comrades in the 7 foreign federations,† expels the entire state of Michigan, and our State Executive Committee expels Locals Buffalo, Rochester, Bronx, Kings, and Queens, besides smaller locals, without a general party discussion and a referendum vote being taken of the rank and file to determine how the majority of the American Socialist Party stands on this important matter. Just think of it! One-half of the membership of our party thrown out or suspended because they dared think otherwise than the officialdom of the party!

The Left Wing platform, policies, and tactics should be thrashed out by the coming National Emergency Convention and its recommendation submitted to a referendum vote of the membership. They deserve serious study and discussion. The controversy is not confined to Local New York or to Michigan or the American Socialist Party. It is an international problem — one of the natural problems of reconstruction arising from the breakup of the 2nd International and rebuilding of our movement along stronger lines. The movement abroad is agitated by the same demand for a more revolutionary attitude and a change in tactics. Only a few days ago we were informed that the Socialist Party of Norway was captured by the Left Wing.

The old International was wrecked by the social

patriots who betrayed the international class struggle. In our own country, yes, in Local New York, it was not so long ago that our leaders were defending the false defensive war doctrines of Scheidemann and the other European social patriots. Only recently was the St. Louis report violated by our elected officials in the Board of Aldermen. One needs but look upon the victory arch to see inscribed thereon “Murmansk” to commemorate a victory over the Bolsheviki to know what I mean.

A change in party policies, principles, and even tactics to a certain extent is necessary. Even the comrades opposed to the Left Wing admit that a change in policies and principles is necessary. But they have been awakened to this realization a bit too late by the prodding of the Left Wing. For some time I have noticed a new leadership coming to the fore. The rank and file has been for a long time more radical than its leaders. The Left Wing crystallized this sentiment into an organization for the purpose of making a more efficient effort to bring about a change. The rank and file began to flock towards them. The politicians in our party, those holding office and those aspiring to hold office, those employed by the party or the party-endorsed institutions, began to see their grip on the party machinery slipping and have resorted to drastic and in some cases questionable tactics far worse than those of which the Left Wing are alleged to be guilty.

These comrades control the City Committee, the Central Committee of Local New York, as well as its Executive Committee, the State Committee, the State Executive Committee, and to a great extent, the New York Call Board of Management. The entire machin-

†- The 7 Federations suspended by the Socialist Party's National Executive Committee on May 28, 1919, were the Russian, Lithuanian, Latvian, Polish, Ukrainian, South Slavic, and Hungarian.

ery of these organizations is in the hands of comrades who are practically the same, year in and year out, and are the most conservative in our party. The bad feature of it is that many of these comrades are not satisfied with sitting on 1 committee, but sit on 3, 4, and 5 of these committees, and so have built up what Comrade Aleinicoff called "the machine."

The greatest crime that has been perpetrated on the party is that of the State Executive Committee. On April 26, 1919, it was decided that a referendum be issued on the question whether branches and locals shall be thrown out of the party for joining the Left Wing. This was to be sent out within 2 weeks. It was not done. On May 21 the committee again decided to send it out. Almost 2 months have rolled by since it was first ordered, yet, in some mysterious way, it has been sidetracked. This is outrageous. Those responsible should be immediately brought up on charges. They probably realized that the question would be overwhelmingly defeated and hence they took the law into their own hands and began to expel and reorganize locals and branches. Is it their desire to expel enough Left Wingers to have things their own way and jam through whatever referendums or legislation that they wish?

With the utmost speed, they proceed to disfranchise those more revolutionary comrades, probably with a view of packing the coming National Convention and depriving the opposition from an opportunity of laying their side of the story before the convention and ultimately before the rank and file. The action of these individuals is doing more harm to the party than all the alleged abuses of the Left Wing. It certainly is unfair for the National Executive Committee to circularize all of the locals with letters asking them not to second a motion instituted by the suspended foreign federations for a referendum in New York. Locals and branches are expelled and nominations for the fall campaign are then rushed. Why?

Recently the City Committee held a meeting. Both sides participated. When the vote showed that

the Left Wingers had a majority, the others left, dug up technicalities and asked that the State Executive Committee rule that the convention was improperly called and hence its proceedings were void. This it did. When the delegate sent by the City Committee appeared at the meeting of The Call Association and asked for the floor to explain, he was hooted down and had to leave the meeting. At the same meeting, delegates from Local Kings were unseated and deprived of a vote without a trial.

In the January [1919] meeting of The Call Association, the Board of Managers brought in a recommendation that the advisory committee of 5 be abolished to make *The Call* more party controlled. In the discussion that followed one of these well-known leaders stated he was opposed, because if the Left Wing captured the party, he wanted that *The Call* should be securely in the board's control, and proceeded to institute an amendment to the bylaws to give the members of the advisory committee the same rights as the other members of the committee, thereby making *The Call* less party controlled than before, especially in view of the present controversy.

I am one of those not affiliated with the Left Wing. I agree with them in many things. In some I disagree. But I believe that it is unjust, undemocratic, unfair, and unsocialistic for one side which controls the machinery of the party to throw out the other side before the entire matter has been thoroughly discussed and the membership of the party given an opportunity to vote. I demand that the expelled and suspended organizations be reinstated and be permitted to send delegates to the various committees and especially take part in the coming Emergency Convention. I demand that the state organization proceed with their referendum before they take any drastic action.

Fraternally yours,

Irvin D. Cline.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.

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