
Circular Letter to the Members of Local New York from the Executive Committee of Local New York.

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To the Members of Local New York.

Comrades:—

A critical situation has arisen within Local New York. Your Executive Committee is compelled to take unusual and vigorous measures to combat the disruptive efforts of an internal faction, which seeks to dominate the party by undemocratic and unsocialistic methods. The Executive Committee addresses itself to you, the membership, to explain the gravity of the crisis and to urge your support in saving the organization which has been built up with so much sacrifice by thousands of comrades.

The very existence of the party is at stake — its existence as the democratically self-governed party of the working class, laboring to awaken and educate the proletarian masses and to express their class interests on the political field.

Do not be deceived. The question at issue is not merely one of revising our party's platform, or its tactics. Differences of opinion on these matters are always in order. The constitution and by-laws of the party give ample opportunity for discussing such questions and deciding them by the will of the majority. Your Executive Committee has neither the right nor the desire to interfere in such matters. On the contrary, it is striving to maintain the normal conditions for free and fair discussion and decision.

On February 16, 1919, a small group of party members met and organized themselves into

what they call the "Left Wing Section of the Socialist Party," and adopted a statement known as the "Manifesto and Program of the Left Wing."

Had it been their object merely to make propaganda for their ideas within the party, with opportunity for the membership to consider their statement seriatim, along with any proposed substitutes of amendments, and to adopt or reject it by orderly referendum, no objection could have been made.

Such was not their purpose. Openly ridiculing all ideas of democracy, they have sought to impose their will upon the party by the systematic use of machine methods utterly inconsistent with majority rule or party unity and self-discipline.

They have formed themselves into a party within the party, dealing exclusively with party affairs, but altogether irresponsible to the party as such. They claim all the rights of party membership, with none of its duties and obligations.

The so-called "Left Wing Section" has a definite organization, with white membership cards, with branches within the party branches (wherever it has been able to form such), with a Central Committee, officers, treasury, and press, parallel with and in opposition to those of the party.

This organization is not open to all party members, nor even to all who accept the ideas set forth in its manifesto and program. Only such persons are admitted as can be counted on to set the authority of the "Left Wing Section" above that of the party itself. Its meetings are held in

secret, and their business is that of a permanent closed caucus to lay plans for controlling the action of the party branches and committees, and of obstructing their activities when it cannot control them.

Even within the "Left Wing Section" itself, democratic methods are not used. The admission of members, the choice of delegates to Left Wing conferences, and the framing of instructions to those delegates, are entrusted to committees composing an inner circle. All members and adherents of the "Left Wing Section" are called upon, in their action as party members and as members of party committees, to give implicit obedience to orders issued by this inner circle. A sufficient sample of this is the appointment of a "Steering Committee" for the Left Wingers in the Central Committee of the local, and the issuance of instructions to delegates affiliated with the section as follows:

"In all matters involving Left Wing tactics, vote as a unit with the Steering Committee. Do not make motions, ask for divisions, further divisions, roll call, and appeals from the chair. The Steering Committee will attend to that."

The "Left Wing Section" has not been able to command a majority in the Central Committee, notwithstanding the drastic methods used in their attempt to capture it. Unable to control, they have practiced systematic obstruction, and have openly declared that they will not permit the Central Committee to function, so long as their group is in the minority there. Under the direction of their Steering Committee, the time is consumed with every species of parliamentary delay, with the aim and effect of preventing the Central Committee from transacting business and carrying on the normal work of the party. These dilatory tactics are supplemented by personal abuse directed against those who will not truckle to the "Left Wing," by insults and provocatory threats, and when necessary by the creation of an uproar, designed to attract the attention of the police and to

break up the sessions.

Similar methods are used in the branches wherever this element has a sufficient foothold. Sometimes they take advantage of a temporary majority to overthrow decisions made by previous and better-attended meetings. Systematically they seek to discourage the attendance of hard working and self-respecting party members, who dislike squabbling and rowdyism, and thus to get control of the branch organization.

In the 2nd AD, in the 3rd-5th-10th, in the 8th, in the 17th, and elsewhere, these tactics have been used for such purposes as the following: To declare the party constitution and bylaws suspended, so far as concerns that particular branch, and so to carry measures which the constitution and bylaws forbid; to recall branch delegates and officers and elect others in their places, without notice to the membership and without secret ballots; to boycott and impede the collection of funds for the party organ, the *New York Call*; to misappropriate branch funds, contributed by the whole branch membership for party work, and donate them to the "Left Wing Section" to be used for its factional ends, and among other things for the publication of a paper known as the Communist, which is filled with slanders upon the party and upon individual members, and is distributed not among party members only, but to the general public at mass meetings and demonstrations arranged by the party.

On March 11th, the Central Committee adopted a resolution declaring that there is no room for such an organization within the Socialist Party, and calling upon all who were members of the "Left Wing Section" to sever their connection with it.

Subsequently, to meet the claim that there is need for a restatement of party principles and a change of party policy and to elicit the opinions of the membership, the Central Committee adopted a resolution favoring an early National Convention, and elected a committee to draft a

statement or resolutions, to be reported to the Central Committee and then submitted to referendum in Local New York, and if adopted to serve as instructions as delegates to the convention. This resolution provided for a minority report, if the committee could not agree, such minority report to go to referendum with the majority report.

The majority of the Central Committee, wishing to give representation to all sides, voted for Dr. Max Cohen and Joseph Brodsky, candidates of the "Left Wing Section," and the other members elected were Scott Nearing, Algernon Lee, Jacob Panken, A.L. Trachtenberg, and S. John Block. The "Left Wing Steering Committee" announced its candidates — Brodsky, Cohen, and Nicholas Hourwich, and called on its adherents to vote for these three only, while the rest of the delegates voted for seven out of a list of twelve. As soon as they saw that their whole slate was not elected, Brodsky and Cohen resigned and refused to act on the committee.

Things came to a climax at the Central Committee meeting of April 22nd. Comrade Solomon was elected chairman, with 39 votes against 19 for Dr. Cohen, who immediately raised objection to the election. From then on, the "Left Wing" adherents did their utmost to prevent the transaction of business. The chief fight came on the seating of delegates from the 17th AD.

The situation in the 17th AD had developed as follows: on April 3rd, a branch meeting was held, after being advertised in *The Call* and by letter to all good-standing members, to consider the proposed recall of 8 of the delegates for alleged violation of the constitution. After long discussion, in which the charges of violating the constitution were dropped and it was made clear that the eight delegates' real offense was opposition to the "Left Wing Section," the motion for recall was defeated by 68 votes to 54. At the next meeting, on April 10th, without notice to members and with a smaller attendance, the attack was renewed. By a vote of 43 to none (the opponents of such

trickery refusing to vote) all officers of the branch except three delegates to the Central Committee were summarily "recalled" and no steps taken to fill their places. It was shown that this action has been planned at a "Left Wing" caucus.

At its meeting on April 14th, the Executive Committee received a complaint from 60 members of the 17th AD, showing that this important branch had been left practically without officers to look after its affairs. Deeming this condition intolerable, the Executive Committee declared the 17th AD in a state of dissolution, and proceeded to reorganize it.

A reorganization meeting was called for April 18th, but as soon as it was started a crowd of people rushed in, including non-members of the branch, and raised so noisy a disturbance that the proprietor would not permit the meeting to go on. Names and addresses were taken, and another meeting called for April 20th. At this meeting 86 members were present, the branch was reorganized, officers and delegates elected. Within a few days more than 150 of the good-standing members were enrolled in the reorganized branch, and others are following.

At its meeting on April 17th, the Executive Committee confirmed the reorganization and voted to recommend the seating of the new delegates.

On April 22nd, the Executive Secretary received what purported to be credentials for 10 new delegates from the 17th AD, signed by Miss Rose Rosen as secretary, for the "Left Wing" portion who had stayed out of the reorganized branch.

Both sets of credentials were submitted to the Central Committee on April 22nd. A motion was made to seat the delegates recognized by the Executive Committee, and an amendment to seat the "Left Wing" delegation. Under the head of the "Steering Committee," every means was used to prevent the Central Committee from coming to a final vote. On every division the "Left Wing-ers" were heavily outvoted. But they shouted out

one point of order after another, one appeal after another, demanding roll call on appeals, and then roll call on the question whether there should be a roll call, and so forth, and finally brought the meeting to the verge of riot. When it became evident that no work could be done that evening, Comrade Karlin moved that when the Central Committee adjourns, it adjourn subject to call by the Executive Committee, and that the Executive Committee be empowered and instructed to reorganize Local New York and put it on a working basis. This motion was adopted.

The Executive Committee is now fulfilling this instruction.

There is no intention on the part of the Executive Committee to censor opinions or to prevent free discussion of party questions. But there is a firm determination to put an end to a state of affairs in which the party has to submit to the dictation of a separate and close minority organization within its ranks. The party must function, and function freely and democratically.

Comrades, at this time when the powers that be are doing all they can to put our spokesmen in jail, suppress our papers, break up our meetings and headquarters, it should be sufficient reason

for all of us to stand together, to prevent paralysis of our forces and a disintegration of our organization.

The Executive Committee has therefore decided not to have a meeting of the Central Committee on May 13th, and has appointed a committee to reorganize Local New York. This committee will begin with such branches as are affiliated with the "Left Wing Section." No one will be excluded because of his opinions, but no one can retain a double membership, in the party and in the so-called "Left Wing Section."

We ask all loyal comrades to be patient, and assist the committee in its work, and we hope that in the interests of our cause, the comrades will stand by the party, and give it their moral and financial support. Rally to the cause, comrades! Come, help us put the party again where it was up to last election. Let there be no room for successionists or separatists in our ranks.

Yours in the Cause,

Executive Committee,
Local New York, Socialist Party.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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