
Socialist Party of St. Louis Makes Appeal for Unity in Organization: Party War Record Does Not Justify “Wing” Row, is Plea.

Published in the *New York Call*, v. 12, no. 200 (July 19, 1919), pg. 6.

The following statement issued by Local St. Louis of the Socialist Party is one of the best that has appeared regarding the internal controversy within the party. Its review of the history of the party during the past few years, the handicaps it has faced, and the tremendous problems suddenly thrust upon it, is written in a sane and tolerant spirit that should appeal to all party members. There is much recalled in this statement that some members apparently have forgotten and which it is well that they should remember. We offer it as one of the best contributions that has yet appeared on this matter.

• • • • •

Comrades:

We are told there is a crisis on in the Socialist Party. We read about the Left Wing and the Right Wing. We are told that a Left Wing has organized a “White Card party” within the Socialist Party in the East. If we are correctly informed, the Left Wing organization in the Socialist Party started in February 1919. This was 3 months after the armistice was signed. While the world war was on we never heard of a Left Wing nor of a Right Wing.

Although the Left Wing was born at such a late date, and the Right Wing seems to be in the embryonic state, we already are witnessing a rather annoying turmoil, which extends from New York, Michigan, and Ohio to the National Socialist Party headquarters in Chicago.

What is the turmoil about? What and who cased a Left Wing to come into existence? What causes a Left Wing to insist on having a Right Wing? In order that we might enjoy a disgraceful family row in our

own ranks? That we might assist the capitalist class in its concerted efforts to break up the Socialist Party and annihilate the American Socialist movement?

What has the Socialist Party of the United States done to necessitate or justify such deplorable efforts? Where and when has the Socialist Party become so hopelessly reactionary or “right wingish” as to necessitate or justify the creation of an underground organization in the party? Why a Left Wing and the insistence on having a Right Wing?

The Socialist Party of the United States and the World War.

When in August 1914 the world war broke out, suddenly and with all the disastrous effects and gigantic dimensions unprecedented in the history of nations, the entire International Socialist movement was thrown into confusion. It was but yesterday when the Socialist comrades in every country held monster peace demonstrations and protested against war — and today, the moment the huge capitalist war machines were set in motion, the same Socialist comrades everywhere found themselves in a helpless, hopeless state of confusion. Too weak in time of peace to overcome the power of capitalism, the International Socialist movement was still more powerless when the hyenas of war were let loose.

The unexpected happened. In Germany and Austria, in England and France, in Russia and Italy, the majority of Socialists were caught in the net of capitalist nationalism; they became jingoes and chauvinists and were made to believe that the world war was a struggle against Tsarism here, against Kaiserism there, and against autocracy and imperialism some-

where else.

True, in every war country there were some Socialists who were not swept off their feet by the formidable war wave, but they were hopelessly in the minority.

The World War's Immediate Effect on Our American Movement.

Our American Socialist Party could not escape the immediate effects the European situation caused by the world war. The fact that a considerable percent of our membership consists of foreign-born comrades made this even more manifest. Many thousands of our party members suddenly forgot their internationalism and became pro-German or pro British, pro-Austrian or pro-Italian, pro-Entente or pro-Central Powers. They lost interest in the Socialist movement, many dropped their membership and embarked on the sea of capitalist nationalism.

There were other Socialist comrades — real, good, and reliable Internationalists. They were so disheartened and shocked by the collapse of the International movement in August 1914 that they became pessimists. Discouraged, almost heartbroken, hopeless they were. Many of them either left the party or remained passive, inactive card members.

This explains the discouraging state of affairs in our Socialist Party in 1914-15. there was nothing surprising about it in the eyes of those who could connect causes and effect, who were able to discern the psychological, moral, and intellectual effects of the bloody world catastrophe.

Socialist Party Remained True to Banner of Internationalism.

During all those days of discouragement, the Socialist Party of the United States remained true to the Red Banner of Internationalism! Its record of the first 2 years of war is a record of revolutionary Socialist honor!

Then came the period of war preparations and "preparedness parades." Again our American Socialist Party, through its national executive officers and the affiliated state, county, and local organizations, showed its true Socialist colors and was not in the least afraid

of leading in the opposition against war preparedness and war! Read the Socialist Party press of those days, especially *The American Socialist!* Refresh your memory and convince yourselves that there wasn't any White Wing business about our party!

The Emergency Convention in St. Louis and the War.

Conscious of its great responsibilities and mission as the political working class organization of the country, the Socialist Party called an Emergency National Convention, which was held in St. Louis during the first week of April 1917. The main object of this convention was to define the party's position on the war question. Before this convention could be called to order, President Wilson, on April 4 [1917], read to the members of Congress his declaration of war against Germany.

When Comrade Morris Hillquit made his great opening speech to the convention delegates assembled at the Planters' Hotel, our country was already in the war. Hillquit's memorable address also was a declaration of war — a revolutionary declaration! Never before had old Planters' Hotel resounded of such genuine, sincere, and enthusiastic applause than at the opening session of the Emergency Convention! There was no Right Wing spirit in Hillquit's keynote speech; neither was there in the storm of applause that greeted it!

The "St. Louis Platform" Without "Right Wings."

The St. Louis Emergency Convention adopted a war program which has since become known as the "St. Louis Platform." Not even the most radical of the radicals will claim that this platform has any Right Wing feathers. It is today an historic document! Future generations will read it with great interest.

You will find this platform in the *Congressional Record*; it was used as the main argument in favor of the Espionage Act! You will find this platform in the official proceedings of the court that sent Eugene V. Debs to jail for 10 years! You will find this platform in the official proceedings of the court that sentenced Kate Richards O'Hare to serve 5 years in the Jefferson City

penitentiary! You will find this platform in the official records of Judge Landis' court that blessed Comrades Adolph Germer, W. Kruse, Victor L. Berger, Louis Engdahl, and Irwin St. John Tucker with jail sentences for 20 years each!

The Espionage Act and the Socialist Party.

Comrades, you are acquainted with the Espionage Law. You know how this law has been used against our Socialist Party, against our Socialist press, against the entire Socialist movement.

Our Socialist papers were suppressed, held up for weeks and months. Entire editions were thrown into the big "waste basket"; those of our papers which survived the ordeal are under censorship, deprived of second class mail privilege. Our national organ, *The American Socialist*, was suppressed. Our present national organ, *The Eye Opener*, is almost suppressed; the numbers being delivered as a rule do not reach the subscribers until 2 and 3 months after date of publication.

Our National Office was raided by the Federal authorities, deprived of the United States post office service. Our National Executive Secretary and other employees of the party are prohibited from using the United States mail for party business. If they want to reach the membership of the party throughout the country, roundabout and indirect methods must be used, similar to the methods used by the Socialists in Prussia under the late Prince Bismarck.

Our National Executive Officers and Leaders are Persecuted.

Because our comrades at the national Socialist Party office have been doing their duty as true, fearless, revolutionary Socialists, they are being persecuted. For alleged violation of the Espionage Act, Adolph Germer, National Executive Secretary, was sentenced to 20 years in jail! Louis Engdahl, editor of our na-

tional organ, was sentenced to 20 years in jail! Comrade Irwin St. John Tucker, national lecturer and employee of the National Office, was sentenced to 20 years in jail! W. Kruse, National Secretary of the Young People's Socialist League, was sentenced to 20 years in jail!

If these comrades are accused of being "Right Wingers," we fail to understand how all the so-called "Left Wingers" succeed in keeping out of jail!†

The Russian Revolution and Our Socialist Party.

A few weeks before the opening of our National Emergency Convention in St. Louis, the Russian Revolution broke out (March 1917). Chairman Morris Hillquit, in opening the convention at Planters' Hotel, proudly and amidst the applause of all the delegates present declared:

"This Russian Revolution is the work of the working class! The working people of Petrograd sacrificed their life blood for the cause of revolution and for the freedom of the Russian people!"

We mention this fact to show that from the very start our Socialist Party bravely and fearlessly stood up for the Russian working class revolution.

The Lvov-Miliukov-Rodzianko bourgeois rule, which followed the ousting of the Tsar, was of short duration. Soon Kerensky was pushed to the helm of the provisional Russian government. Students of the Russian Revolution know Kerensky's efforts to keep the Russian army fighting for the Allied cause; of his difficulties and troubles, and of his downfall in November 1917, when the Bolsheviki, under Lenin and Trotsky, took charge of the affairs of the Soviet republic.

We need not go into details concerning the misrepresentations, defamations, and vilifications spread by the American capitalist press against the Russian Soviet republic under Lenin and Trotsky.

Promptly, and notwithstanding all obstacles and persecution, the Socialist Party hurried to the front in

†- This is a cheap shot. Left Wing leaders Alfred Wagenknecht and C.E. Ruthenberg weren't just sentenced to 20 year terms and bailed out, their convictions eventually overturned on appeal with no prison time served, as was the case with the "Five Socialist Leaders" — rather, they actually served 1 year jail sentences in Ohio in 1918 for their anti-war activity, along with their comrade Charles Baker. Of the Five Socialist Leaders sentenced to draconian 20 year terms by Judge Kennesaw Mountain Landis, two of them, Engdahl and Kruse, would leave the Socialist Party and join the communist Workers Party of America in 1921.

defense of the cause of our Russian comrades. Mass meetings were held, demonstrations in behalf of Soviet Russia were arranged, our Socialist press gave all possible support to counteract the sinister work of the American capitalist press.

During all this time our national officers were doing their duty as International Socialists. Fearlessly they defended Soviet Russia, and they did it in a manner that no honest Socialist could construe as "Right Wingism."

St. Louis Circulated 1,000,000 Pieces of Literature.

From the time of the St. Louis Emergency Convention, in April 1917, to the present day, Local St. Louis of the Socialist Party alone distributed from house to house, in meetings and social gatherings, over 1 million pieces of literature in support and defense of the Russian Soviet republic, pertaining to America's participation in the war, and spreading public information about the revolutionary situation in Europe.

We St. Louis comrades had neither time nor inclination to divide up in Left Wingers and Right Wingers. The work we have been doing in the last 2 years is real Socialist revolutionary work, Left Wing work, if you wish; but we do not pretend to be Left Wingers; neither are we ready to accept the name of Right Wingers. We prefer to do our duty without "wings," and Local St. Louis challenges any ultra-radical in our movement to point out another party local that has done more real, sound "Left Wing" work than our St. Louis comrades.

Local St. Louis Stands by Russian Soviet Republic.

Today, as in the past, Local St. Louis will stand by our Russian comrades, who so nobly and with enormous sacrifices established their working class Soviet republic under the able leadership of Lenin, Trotsky, and others. In this connection we wish to repeat here what our local Socialist organ, the *St. Louis Labor*, of September 7, 1918 said:

"If Marx was the giant in the field of theoretical Socialism, Lenin has become the giant and world leader in the field of practical Socialism — on the battlefield

of the modern class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Lenin is a sober-minded statesman of the proletariat. He is not dealing in 'hazy theories,' but in cold, plain facts as he finds them. He meets conditions as he finds them and tries to make the best he can out of them for the good of the working class and peasants he represents."

We also feel proud of the Hungarian Proletarian Soviet republic! We shall do all within our power to give our Hungarian comrades all possible moral support.

Capitalist Conspiracy to Break Up the Socialist Party.

We need not mention any of the details of the anti-Socialist persecution during the last 2 years. Our political enemies believed that by means of the Espionage Act they would soon have the Socialist Party down and out. When the armistice was signed our Socialist Party had a bigger membership than at the beginning of the war.

This was an unpleasant surprise for our capitalist enemies. For weeks and months they have been planning and conspiring against our movement. Socialism and Bolshevism are sweeping Europe. Social unrest and strikes indicate that conditions in our own country are not improving. Europe is politically bankrupt. The Big Four peace conference has become a council of war — war against Soviet Russia and Soviet Hungary! Imperialism is running wild; it is getting desperate. The ruling classes are afraid of the growing strength of the Socialist movement. Hence the Socialist Party must be crushed!

American Espionage Act Demanded of Congress.

Under date of June 14 [1919], a Washington press dispatch informs us that the Senate Judiciary Committee is ready to report a new Espionage Act for peacetime. We know what this means. It means endless persecution for the Socialists! Today the Socialist Party in St. Louis cannot hold any public meeting or entertainment without having from 15 to 50 uniformed policemen present; at our May Day celebration there were over 100 uniformed men and many

secret service agents in attendance.

The Sensational “Bomb Plants” and Their Meaning.

Attorney General Palmer demands \$500,000 to fight “dynamiters” and “Bolshevism.” He informs the public that “200 secret service agents of the Navy Intelligence Bureau are investigating gigantic plots to explode bombs in St. Louis, Chicago, New York, Washington, and more than a score of other large cities on July 4 [1919].”

Bombs were distributed by mail on May 1 [1919]. None of the “dynamiters” was arrested. A few weeks later dynamite explosions were simultaneously “pulled off” in a number of cities. St. Louis newspapers tell us that a young clerk who killed his “boss” and then committed suicide had a copy of *St. Louis Labor* in his pocket; the copy was dated June 23, 1917, “which assailed the United States going into war.” Now it happened that the same issue of *St. Louis Labor* was held up by the post office and never delivered to the subscribers. Possibly some secret service agent tried to make a Bolshevik out of a dead man! In Chicago detectives discover dynamite in coal piles! All these “discoveries” smell of the professional agent provocateur.

Never before has there been such a general, concerted, and desperate drive against the Socialist movement as at this very time! Never before has the Socialist Party been attacked, persecuted, and maligned by such an army of capitalist enemies as at present. And never before has the membership of the Socialist Party had greater responsibility than today.

Attempt to Destroy the Organization from Inside.

The capitalist class failed to break up our Socialist Party by attacking it from the outside and by vicious persecution. Attempts will now be made to try the destructive work from the inside. There are many ways of procedure, which are best known to the secret agents and agents provocateurs.

It is unfortunate that at this most critical time, when the Socialist Party ought to show a united and solid front to resist the offensive of destruction launched by our common enemy, our organization

should be checked and hindered in its work by a so-called Left Wing movement, and that a “White Card” underground organization should be formed in the party. We can see neither rhyme nor reason in such a sideshow movement.

Michigan State Organization Put Itself Out of Socialist Party.

The so-called Left Wing “party” in the party is moving very fast. In what direction? The very near future will furnish the answer! Since 1896 the Socialist movement of this country has had about half a dozen of similar Left Wing sideshows — and every one of them has ended in fiasco! We remember the days when even ex-Comrades A.M. Simons, Charles Edward Russell, [William English] Walling, [Graham Phelps] Stokes, and many others were “Left Wingers,” and today they find themselves in the Convent of St. Gompers under the political protectorate of Woodrow Wilson!

At the recent state convention, the Socialist Party of Michigan not only repudiated the national party platform and constitution, but openly and defiantly declared war on the entire national Socialist Party by adopting the following amendment to the state constitution:

“Any member, local, or branch of a local, advocating legislative reforms or supporting organizations formed for the purpose of advocating such reforms shall be expelled from the Socialist Party. The State Executive Committee is authorized to revoke the charter of any local that does not conform to this amendment.”

In plain English: The Socialist state convention of Michigan decides to expel any member or branch that defends, advocates, or accepts the national platform of the Socialist Party as adopted by the St. Louis Emergency Convention!

By this action Michigan automatically put itself outside of the Socialist Party of the United States! The National Executive Board revoked the charter of the Michigan state organization. That was superfluous! All it should have done was to declare that the adoption of the above amendment to its state constitution meant a withdrawal of the Michigan state organization from the Socialist Party.

For instance: What business would Local St. Louis have in the Socialist Party of the United States if it repudiated the party's platform and threatened with expulsion each and every member who stands for that platform?

The Suspension of Language Federations.

The National Executive Committee also suspended the Russian, Lithuanian, Lettish [Latvian], Ukrainian, Hungarian, and South Slavic Federations. Whether the suspension of these language federations was justified the investigation by the national convention will have to show.

The National Executive Committee has appointed a special committee to investigate the evidence upon which the suspension of these federations is based. This committee also stands instructed to investigate the alleged fraudulent practices in the recent referendum and report its findings to the special national convention which will meet in Chicago, beginning August 30, 1919.

We learn that those charged with the alleged offenses are demanding referenda to set aside the action of the National Executive Committee. In our opinion such a move at this time would be unwise. Our members should not be expected to vote on a referendum without first having had opportunity of becoming acquainted with the evidence as was presented to the National Executive Committee. It cannot be denied that such a referendum would be taken in ignorance of the facts in the case.

At the national convention, on August 30, 1919, at which all the states will be represented, the special committee will make its report, submitting the mass of evidence examined. The Michigan state organization and the suspended foreign language federations will be heard. We advise our party members not to act on any proposed referendum in this controversy, and to await the action of the special national convention.

This advice is given on the ground that we want our members to act conscientiously and intelligently on a matter of such vital importance to our party and to our movement. We heartily subscribe to the fol-

lowing sentence, quoted from the National Executive Committee's report on this controversy:

At a time when the party is hounded by the powers that be; when our spokesmen and officers are jailed; when our papers are suppressed; when our meetings are prohibited; this is the time when all our forces should stand together.

Conclusion — Attitude of Local St. Louis.

We repeat: We cannot see any good reason for the so-called Left Wing movement in our Socialist Party. To charge our national officers with being Scheidemann Socialists and Right Wingers is ridiculous. The only class that can gain by the Left Wing disturbance is the capitalist class that is organizing a nationwide campaign for the disruption and destruction of the Socialist Party.

Local St. Louis takes the ground that the Socialist Party must be a bona fide working class party, or it will cease to exist. We are not afraid of accepting the program of the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat," but to bring this dictatorship about we are not willing or ready to lose ourselves in the nebulous regions of phrase-chewing ultra-radicalism and irresponsibility.

We appeal to the Socialists and class-conscious workers throughout the country to stand by the Socialist Party that has so nobly and courageously upheld the banner of true Internationalism and working class interests during the most critical years in our country's history!

We appeal to the comrades everywhere to uphold our national platform and constitution, adopted by the St. Louis Convention in April 1917, and sanctioned by referendum vote, until the next national convention on August 30, we will have a chance to revise or remake platform and constitution in line with the changed economic and social conditions and the revolutionary situation created by the war.

Let us eliminate the entire "Wing" business — Left and Right — and put our shoulders to the wheel in order that we may lead our movement to victory and success.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2007. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.