
Letter to Johnson H. Meek in Yarrow, MO from William L. Garver, State Secretary of the SP of Missouri in Springfield, MO, October 16, 1919

Published in *St. Louis Labor*, whole no. 977 (Oct. 25, 1919), pg. 3.

Springfield, Mo., October 16, 1919.

Johnson H. Meek,
Yarrow, Mo.

Dear Comrade:—

Replying to your letter of the other day, will say that I am convinced more than ever with the passage of time that the party took the wisest course in the Chicago convention.

I believe we are getting ready for a big political campaign in 1920, something that would have been hampered and held back if the elements that have lost hope in political action had had a dominating influence in the party.

The former comrades who went to the Communist Party and the Communist Labor Party are dominated by the idea of what they call Mass Action, using it to distinguish what they have in mind from political action.

Now, this term, in my opinion, is simply a veil for force. Yet, strange to relate, the very ones who use it have not great body organized to respond to their call for force.

I contend that the American people can still use the ballot and get the police and army in their control through political action if they want to.

And I further contend that their ballots will be counted when enough of them demand that they be counted. So long as there are not enough to even provide the watchers that the law under Capitalism provides, why they may not be counted.

Of course, if I was an immigrant from some other country and had never been naturalized and could not, therefore, vote, I might not believe in political action. The question naturally arises why, in such a case, I should join a political party and try to dominate its methods. This is what the suspended foreign federations tried to do.

I am ready and willing to use force, but I want to have the public opinion of the masses of the people on our side when the force is used, and the only way to have it is to have the force clothed with the legal power. Let us get the police force and the army and navy in our power and on our side. This is what will happen when we get the political power.

You may not like police-controlled meetings. Well, it all depends.

Last May I spoke at the Socialist celebration in the coliseum in St. Louis. There were 100 or more policemen present. They were not invited. I was sitting there in the morning when a large squad marched in, paraded around the hall, and sat down. After a while they went out and in like manner came back later on. If a fight had taken place there between some who had no tickets of admission and those in charge of the hall, don't you know that the police would have interfered without our action and thrown out the ones who had no tickets.

Well, that is just what happened at Chicago. Every delegate had an opportunity to get a ticket entitling him to a seat in the convention hall.

A number who had refused to pay dues and who had confiscated all moneys from the sale of convention stamps would not and did not get these tickets.

A rumpus followed and they were ejected.

They should have been ejected.

And I for one would not have hesitated to call the police to do the dirty work.

I believe if a horse thief were to steal your horses, you would go to the sheriff and, if necessary, the police to try to get them back.

You would have a right to. That is their function. That is what they are paid for. The policeman is all right when he does the right kind of work for which he should receive wages. It is only when he becomes the tool of the capitalist that he becomes an obnoxious creature and should be condemned.

If a gang of roughs were to invade my home I would not hesitate a minute to call the police to eject them. And those who invade the convention hall where a conference is to be held to protect my family and children's rights to a better and nobler industrial system and civilization are intruders. I am in favor of calling the police to oust the intruders.

The most regrettable thing about this whole controversy is the manner in which sincere comrades swallow without apparent question the accusations hurled at the old-time workers who for 20 or even 30 years have worked for the upbuilding of the Socialist Party.

Along comes someone who has not had his ambition for leadership gratified and makes charges against the officials, and immediately the rank and file, who have developed such abnormal faculties of criticizing the exploiters and capitalists, cannot help but use the same critical faculties upon their own comrades.

I sent you a circular signed by [William] Brandt, [Gus] Hoehn, [Jacob] Kassner, and [Caleb] Lipscomb, the 4 delegates from this state to the Chicago convention, and they all said that the action taken by the officials in suspending the foreign language federations

and the Michigan organization was justified. They even went so far as to raise \$177.50 out of their own pockets to help pay the expenses of the convention. And I have sent out a call for contributions to help pay it back. St. Louis has already sent in over \$75, Springfield \$10, Maplewood \$10, Kansas City, under Left Wingers, nothing.

But Kansas City has been reorganized and Germer will have a meeting there tomorrow night [Oct. 17, 1919]. And by 1920 the Socialist Party, freed from the saboteurs within, will be in a position to win the support of the millions of organized workers of this country, and we will yet secure a change in this country without the necessity of civil war and all the horrors that such war means. Will the country districts be in this movement? I don't know. There is a tendency to array the country against the city. I hope it will not succeed.

I hope that Mt. Zion will keep in touch with the old guard of Socialism and not believe that [Victor] Berger, [John] Work, [Seymour] Stedman, [James] Oneal, [Adolph] Germer, and the rest of them are Scheidemanns and traitors because some irresponsible says so.

Local Cleveland, O., held up the question of affiliation with the Communist Labor Party, so-called, and they got 3 votes, counting Wagenknecht's, the National Secretary. The Foreign Language Federation Communist Party got 179. The Socialist Party got 28. Thirty-some-odd took no part, saying it was a fight for offices. It was. And out of this fight for office by those who were out came this whole division. I stand by the Socialist Party.

Faternally,

W.L. Garver.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2011. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.