
Letter to C.W. Fitzgerald in Beverly, Massachusetts from N. Lenin [V.I. Ul'ianov] in Berne, Switzerland. “Written between Nov. 13 and Nov. 22, 1915.” †

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To the Secretary of the Socialist Propaganda League
Mr. C.W. Fitzgerald,
20 *<illeg. St.*
Beverly, Mass.

Dear Comrades!

We are extremely glad to get your leaflet. Your appeal to the members of the Socialist Party to struggle for a new International, for clear-cut revolutionary socialism as taught by Marx and Engels, and against the opportunism, especially against those who are in favor of working class participation in a war of defence, corresponds fully with the position our party (Social-Democratic Labor Party of Russia, *Central Committee*) has taken from the beginning of this war and has always taken during more than ten years.

We send you our sincerest greetings and best wishes of success in our fight for true internationalism.

In our press and in our propaganda we differ from your program in several points and we think it is quite necessary that we expose you briefly these points in order to make immediate and serious steps for the coordination of the international strife of the uncompromisingly revolutionary Socialists especially Marxists in all countries.

We criticize in the most severe manner the old, Second (1889-1914) International, we declare it dead and not worth to be restored on old basis. But we never say in our press that too great emphasis has been heretofore placed upon so-called “Immediate Demands,” and that thereby the socialism can be diluted: we say and we prove that all bourgeois parties, all parties except the working-class revolutionary Party, are liars and hypocrites

when they speak about reforms. We try to help the working class to get the smallest possible but real improvement (economic and political) in their situation and we add always that *no* reform can be durable, sincere, serious if not seconded by revolutionary methods of struggle of the masses. We preach always that a socialist party not uniting this struggle for reforms with the revolutionary methods of working-class movement can become a sect, can be severed from the masses, and that that is the most pernicious menace to the success of the clear-cut revolutionary socialism.

We defend always in our press the democracy in the party. But we never speak against the centralization of the party. We are for the democratic centralism. We say that the centralization of the German Labor movement is not a feeble but a strong and good feature of it. The vice of the present Social Democratic Party of Germany consists not in the centralization but in the preponderance of the opportunists, which should be excluded from the party especially now after their treacherous conduct in the war. If in any given crisis the small group (for instance our Central Committee is a small group) can act for directing the mighty mass *in a revolutionary direction*, it would be very good. And in all crises the masses can not act immediately, the masses want to be helped by the small groups of the central institutions of the parties. Our Central Committee quite at the beginning of this war, in September 1914, has directed the masses not to accept the lie about “the war of defence” and to break off with the opportunists and the “would-be-socialists-jingoes” (we call so the “Socialists” who are *now* in favor of the war of defence). We think that this centralistic measure of our Central Committee was useful and necessary.

†- Date of correspondence here as published in Lenin: Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii [5th Russian Edition], v. 27, pp. 75; 496-497, said to be in reply to a letter from “the Secretary of the Socialist Propaganda League” received Nov. 13, 1915. A published facsimile of the first page of the letter is the source for the name of Lenin’s correspondent. The original of this letter was handwritten in English, thus the minor grammatical errors.

We agree with you that we must be against craft Unionism and in favor of industrial Unionism, i.e. of big, centralized Trade Unions and in favor of the most active participation of *all* members of party in *all* economic struggles and in *all* trade union and cooperative organizations of the working class. But we consider that such people as Mr. Legien in Germany and Mr. Gompers in the US are bourgeois and that their policy is not a socialist but a nationalistic, middle class policy. Mr. Legien, Mr. Gompers, and similar persons are not the representatives of working class, they represent the aristocracy and bureaucracy of the working class.

We entirely sympathize with you when in political action you claim the "mass action" of the workers. The German revolutionary and internationalist Socialists claim it also. In our press we try to define with more details what must be understood by political mass action, as [for instance], political strikes (very usual in Russia), street demonstrations and civil war prepared by the present imperialist war between nations.

We do not preach unity in the *present* (prevailing in the Second International) socialist parties. On the contrary we preach *secession* with the opportunists. The war is the best object-lesson. In all countries the opportunists, their leaders, their most influential dailies and reviews are *for* the war, in other words, they have in reality *united* with "their" national bourgeoisie (middle class, capitalists) against the proletarian masses. You say, that in America there are also Socialists who have expressed themselves in favor of the participation in a war of defence. We are convinced, that unity with such men is an evil. *Such* unity is unity with the national middle class and capitalists, and a *division* with the international revolutionary working class. And we are for secession with nationalistic opportunists and unity with international revolutionary Marxists and working-class parties.

We never object in our press to the unity of SP and SLP in America. We always quote letters from Marx & Engels (especially to Sorge, active member of American socialist movement), where both condemn the sectarian character of the SLP.

We fully agree with you in your criticism of the

old International. We have participated in the conference of Zimmerwald (Switzerland) Sept. 5-8, 1915. We have formed there a *left wing*, and have proposed *our resolution* and our draft of a manifesto. We have just published these documents in German and I send them to you (with the German translation of our small book about *Socialism and War*), hoping that in your League there are probably comrades, that know German. If you could help us to publish these things in English (it is possible only in America and later on we should send it to England), we would gladly accept your help.

In our struggle for true internationalism and against "jingo-socialism" we always quote in our press the example of the opportunist leaders of the SP in America, who are in favor of restrictions of the immigration of Chinese and Japanese workers (especially after the Congress of Stuttgart, 1907, and *against* the decisions of Stuttgart). We think that one can not be internationalist and be at the same time in favor of such restrictions. And we assert that Socialists in America, especially English Socialists, belonging to the ruling, and *oppressing* nation, who are not against any restrictions of immigration, against the possession of colonies (Hawaii) and for the entire freedom of colonies, that such Socialists are in reality jingoes.

For conclusion I repeat once more best greetings and wishes for your League. We should be very glad to have a further information from you and to *unite* our struggle against opportunism and for the true internationalism.

Yours,
N. Lenin

N. B. There are *two* Social Democratic parties in Russia. Our party ("Central Committee") is against opportunism. The other party ("Organization Committee") is opportunist. We are against the unity with them.

You can write to our official address (Bibliothèque russe. For the C. K. 7 rue Hugo de Senger. 7. Genève. Switzerland). But better write to my personal address: WI. Ulianow. Seidenweg 4a, III Berne. Switzerland.

*Transcription by David Walters and Robert Cymbala.
Additional editing with a footnote by Tim Davenport.*

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