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# State Committee Proposition: Letter to the Editor of the *New York Call*, published April 23, 1919.

by L. Basky

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Editor of *The Call*:

The New York State Committee of the Socialist Party has, by vote of 24 against 17:

“Resolved, that the New York State Committee of the Socialist Party is definitely opposed to the organization calling itself the Left Wing Section of the Socialist Party and any group within the party organized for the same or similar purpose, and be it further

“Resolved, that the State Committee instructs its Executive Committee to revoke the charter of any local that affiliates with any such organization or that permits its subdivisions or members to be affiliated.”

A timely suggestion. It will be sent to referendum vote, with the “whereas,” as preceding it, thereby forcing members to face the situation squarely that is neither wise nor possible to shun.

Now, let us make the issue as clear cut as it is simple. There has been in the Socialist Party an ever-increasing number of revolutionary socialists who had carried on a struggle to eliminate the radical bourgeois socialism in the Socialist Party. These members, being busy at work to build up the party, never attempted to organize their efforts on a national or at somewhat larger scale. Their limit in this direction was reached in forming a club here and there and issuing a leaflet once in a while. For this reason their efforts at state and national conventions were doomed to failure in face of well-connected officialdom that had all the means of reaching and influencing the members in favor to their positions and ideas. But with the passing of years the position and policies of the “minority” became clearer and much more easily comprehensible by the rank and file, though thousands of who were

just recruited from the indifferent mass of workers and of the middle class. The development of capitalism has made the class differences sharper, the class struggle more intensified and more bitter. And when the St. Louis convention came, the necessity of a clear cut and uncompromising stand was patent to the majority of the delegates. And this majority has overwhelmed even V. Berger, who is the most prominent type of our social-reformists. Even he had to bow to the “reds,” “fearing that they might do even worse than what they have done,” as he explained it to the court.

While the St. Louis Convention [April 7-14, 1917] had taken the position of the radical element in regard to one particular question — the war, it didn’t bring about a complete change in the policies of the party.

It occurred to some of the comrades that it was high time to set the party abreast of the revolutionary events — to make it equal to the task confronted, to make it a useful instrument in the darkest and bitterest and most critical hours of the class struggle instead of making it what the Social Democratic Party of Germany turned out to be — the last fortress of the dying capitalist system.

They have realized that they must have organization to do this. Accordingly they formed and organized the Left Wing of the Socialist Party. This Left Wing in New York has adopted a definite program, published in a manifesto. The most important feature are the demands: To abolish all reform planks in the Socialists’ party platform; to strictly adhere to an uncompromising class struggle, the last phase of which will be the dictatorship of the proletariat; to propagate revolutionary industrial unionism; to have the

party own all its official papers and institutions; to repudiate the Berne Congress and to elect delegates to an international congress proposed by the Communist Party of Russia.

All of which are heartily endorsed by the members of the Hungarian Branch, Local New York, by the branch officially, and by the Hungarian Federation of the Socialist Party, and by its daily paper, the *Elore*, also. We endorsed these principles long before there was a Left Wing movement. We cannot think of "party press" not owned by the party, we have endorsed the principles of revolutionary industrial unionism 3 years ago, we have always opposed "opportunism" and compromise, and those of us who ever had faith in the idea of "growing into the socialistic state" through pure and simple parliamentary action have lost this faith in the last 4 or 5 years. We have seen too many of these "growing in" politicians in Germany, in Russia, in Hungary, and here, too. Over here we shall see a few more before this Left Wing movement is settled.

Yes, we have endorsed the Left Wing and its propositions. We have acclaimed it with joy. We have asked ourselves in despair: Is the American proletariat to go through the same struggle, fratricide, and agony now experienced by the German proletariat? If they couldn't grasp the teachings of Marx, Engels, Liebknecht, Dietzgen, and the best of our theorists, can't they at least understand what is going on before their very eyes? So they realize the danger of attracting bourgeois elements (elements foreign to the nature and interests of the working class) by a compromising attitude, by working for reforms that were advocated long ago by our enemies as the best means to sidetrack revolutionary sentiments, by conducting campaigns with an eye to immediate success rather than education? Didn't they see some of our "best" comrades sink in the mire of pure and simple parliamentarianism, while others are fast sinking now?

Do they know that in the "socialist system" a political state is unthinkable; that after establishing industrial democracy, we shall have not political, but industrial administration? Are they aware of the fact that by having a class-conscious economic organization, an industrial union of socialists, we shall eliminate most of the disorder, confusion, and stagnation that will inevitably follow the overflow of capitalist rule?

Almost at the point of giving up hope, there came the answer with the manifesto of the Left Wing: Yes, we see what is going on, we grasp the situation, we know what to do — and we shall do it!

Now, the all important question is this: Do the majority of the members adopt the proposition of the Left Wing? I am not interested in technicalities. But I claim that I have never signed away my right to work toward changing the policies of the party, if they are to be changed in my opinion. I never gave up my right to come together with my comrades to discuss party matters. In practically all the European socialist parties (when they are united) there are recognized factions, with their official papers and gatherings.

Aside of these arguments the Left Wing is not a counter-organization to the Socialist Party. On the contrary, it is the only active force to save the party from going into decay and finally to the scrap heap as a tool not adapted to the task. If the Left Wing is the party, then and only then can we answer the criticism of the syndicalists that a political party is nothing else but a vote-catching machinery for middle-class politicians. If the principles enunciated in the manifesto will be the principles of the party, then it will enjoy the confidence of those who, through their bitter experience, realized the fallacies of the Second International, led and dominated by the social-patriots, reformists of the German Social Democratic Party. If we follow the line of uncompromising, revolutionary activity indicated by the Left Wingers, then we can rest assured that the party will be cleared of the would-be Scheidemanns, Eberts, Kerenskys, Brantenburgs, and the rest of the traitors to our principles and our class.

They will be eliminated anyway. The fight is on. And I welcome the attack of the State Committee. We at least know some of those we would have to face in the critical hour. Might as well fight it out now, whether they or the Left Wing represents the party. Let us find out right now who is with us and who is against us.

But in this fight let us not befog the issue. Let us have at least courageous and honest opponents. Are we to be expelled for our principles and ideas? Or is it possible that they approve these ideas, but want to throw us out of the party because we are propagating these ideas? Or do they have the audacity to try to make the general membership believe that, while they approve of our ideas, while they have no objection to

propagating these ideas, we are to be punished by expulsion for the alleged offense of “violating the spirit of the constitution” in our efforts to have these generally accepted principles adopted by the party officially?

It seems to me that this is the case, judging by the “whereas” of the resolution, and by the adoption of two other resolutions, one condemning the reactionary socialists in Germany and the other greeting the Hungarian republic.

But I am sure the members at large know full well that the Independents and Spartacans are in Germany what the Left Wing is here, and our would-be expellers are what they call “reactionary socialists” in Germany. And, as for the Hungarian socialists and communists, let me say this: They went through the same fight against the reactionary socialists of Hungary as the Spartacans are going through in Germany, and we, the “Left Wing,” shall go through here. Only in Hungary the “reactionary socialists” were not half as reactionary as those in Germany, and, apparently, the 24 of the State Committee of the New York Socialist Party.

They have joined forces in Hungary, and so made their revolution successful and least bloody. And certainly they, the socialists and communists of Hungary, would spurn the greetings of these 24, would they but know that these very same men intend to expel the Left Wingers — the very comrades closest to their hearts.

By all means let us have the referendum. Let us find out whether the 24 represents the general membership.

*F. Basky.*

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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