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# Spargo Resigns: Letter to Adolph Germer in Chicago from John Spargo. [circa June 7, 1917]

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*The following is the letter of resignation sent by John Spargo to the Executive Secretary of the Party:*

My Dear Germer:

After long and careful consideration, I have decided to resign from the National Executive Committee, and from the Socialist Party. Kindly communicate this fact to my colleagues, the remaining members of the committee.

I feel that I can not take such a step without some word of explanation to the party membership. Not only are they entitled to know my reasons for withdrawing from the party and my intentions, so far as these concern the party, but a frank and full statement from me at this time will perhaps prevent a good deal of misunderstanding in the future.

At the outset let me say that I withdraw from the party without any ill-feeling or sense of personal grievance. For you and your assistants in the National Office, and for each member of the National Executive Committee, I have now, as at all times, profound respect and sincere friendship. In view of the acrimonious tone of much of the discussion which has taken place in the party recently, it seems desirable to emphasize this. In my contri-

butions to the discussion of our war policy I have frequently and vigorously dissented from what seems to be the majority view. What I have had to say of the party and its policy I have said through our regular party channels of communication. I have not intentionally attacked any individual. If I have appeared to do this in any case, I sincerely regret the fact and beg those who appeared to be

so attacked to accept this assurance that nothing was farther from my thoughts. Of all the good my life has known I count highest and best the comradeship of the men and women of the Socialist Party during these many years, and I would not in leaving the party mar that experience by any word of bitterness or reproach.

My withdrawal from the Socialist Party does not mean that I have decided to renounce Socialism. My

Socialist convictions were never more intense than now. Now, as always, I am a Socialist, and internationalist, and an anti-militarist. I leave the party with which I have been identified from its formation, and in which I have been privileged to hold the highest positions in the gift of the members, because I am profoundly convinced that it has



ceased to be an efficient instrument for the advancement of Socialism. For a long time it has been painfully clear to my mind that the Socialist Party is probably the greatest single obstacle to the progress of Socialism in America.

Of course, the immediate cause of my resignation is the fundamental difference between the majority of the National Executive Committee — and apparently the party membership — and myself upon the question of the policy to be adopted by the party in the present circumstances. But, as you and a great many other party members know, there are other serious differences, antedating the war.

From the earliest days of the war the Socialist Party has, in actual practice, been committed to a program essentially un-neutral, un-American, and pro-German. Knowing well that every sincere pacifist who criticizes or opposes the war is bound to be dubbed “pro-German,” and perhaps subject to real persecution, I have hesitated to use that term, and hasten to add that I do not think that there has been (except in a few unfortunate circumstances) any conscious advocacy of the German cause, as such. But it is a fact that, from the first, the party as a whole has been, with notable uniformity, on the German side. Through the utterances and actions of the National Executive Committee, the National Committee, and our press, the party has been placed in the position of favoring precisely the things desired by the German foreign office, and of opposing the things which the German foreign office opposed. We have repeated all the miserable evasions and apologies of German statesmen, and been silent upon those questions on which German interests required silence.

The truth of this can hardly be questioned. At the time when the German foreign secretary was demanding that the government of the United States warn its citizens from going to sea on ships bound for certain countries, the same demand was made by our party. And when the Germans de-

manded that our government place an embargo on all munitions and foodstuffs, we adopted that demand as the center of our policy, notwithstanding the fact that the principle involved, if universally accepted by nations, would, pending the arrival of the era of universal disarmament, impose upon this and every other nation a colossal military system. Later, when the severance of diplomatic relations with Germany made war imminent, our Emergency Committee repeated this Teutonic demand. Coincidentally, by the way, it was made by Mr. Jeremiah O’Leary, New York.

Many of our leading spokesmen and journalists have made the most nauseating apologies for the betrayal of International Socialism by the German Socialist majority and have been silent upon the outrages committed in Belgium as the most loyal subjects of the Hohenzollern dynasty would desire. Our so-called anti-war proclamation was, as I pointed out at the time, simply an evasive apology for the whole Germany policy of “frightfulness” and international anarchy.

Of the resolution adopted by the Emergency Convention at St. Louis [April 7-14, 1917], I have written at length in the party press, and spoken candidly at a party meeting in New York [May 20, 1917]. It is enough to say here that the resolution is, to my mind, a betrayal of the basic principles of International Socialism; that it is grossly inaccurate in its statements on matters of fact and record, and that it includes a program of action likely to destroy the Socialist movement in this country, and to make the very word an offense to the American people.

What is it but a betrayal of the accepted principles of International Socialism to declare that the war now going on, the issue between the two groups of powers, is “no concern of the workers”? What is it but a denial of nationalism, without which there can be no internationalism, to say that the only struggle which would justify the workers taking up arms is the social war; that, therefore, all struggles for national independence are

unjustifiable? What is it but a fundamental departure from the Socialism of Marx and Engels, of [Wilhelm] Liebknecht and Jaures, to urge equally upon the Belgian and German workers "to withdraw all support from their government"? Is it not clear that the Belgian government, in defending its territory and people against unwarranted invasion merited the support of all Belgian Socialists, upon Socialist grounds, while the German government, engaged in a dastardly violation of the sovereignty of a peaceful and friendly neighbor, merited the opposition of the German Socialists to the end of the war? To contend otherwise is to set Socialism against the moral sense of mankind. Even Von Bethman-Hollweg, admitting the grave wrong done to Belgium, manifested in that moment of unwonted candor, a keener appreciation of the essentials of internationalism and Socialism than did our National Emergency Convention.

The resolution adopted by the convention, and which appears likely to receive the endorsement of the membership, declares that "In all modern history there has been no war more unjustified than the war in which we are about to engage." One thinks of the Franco-Prussian War, the Boer War, and the miserable land-grabbing Italian-Turkish war over Tripoli, to name only a few modern wars, and concludes that this declaration is the product of hysterical rather than historical minds.

From the opening of the great war I have believed and freely said that the best interests of civilization and of International Socialism will be served by a definite defeat of the Central Empires, I have believed and said that the victory of German militarism would be a supreme disaster to civilization, a serious check to the International Socialist movement, and a terrible menace to the United States and its democratic institutions. Putting aside all the intricate maze of diplomatic contentions, the struggle from the first has appeared to me to be, in actuality, a conflict between mili-

tarist autocracy and democracy. I am well aware that the countries fighting against Germany have their military systems, and that none of them, not even the United States, is a perfect democracy. But I also know that Germany embodies the spirit of militarism in a special and unique way, and that the Entente countries embody the spirit of democracy in a greater degree than Germany or any of her allies. Naturally when I have given expression to these views I have been called pro-Ally, and the fact that I was born in England and educated there has been offered in explanation. I have been accused of letting my nationalist feelings dominate my internationalism. On the other hand, those who have taken the opposite position, and have either excused or defended German acts, or advocated as American policies in the name of neutrality the measures which would fit into the plans of Germany and have actually been contended for by the diplomats of the Central Empires, have loudly proclaimed their freedom from nationalist bias, despite their foreign birth and lineage.

Now, as a matter of personal history, I was born in England and it would be foolish to claim that my British lineage, birth, education, and associations have never influenced my views on this war. Any man making such a claim would have to ignore the vastly important psychological processes of the subconscious mind. All that I can say is that from the first I have tried to view the war as an internationalist, not as a nationalist. Never once have I asked myself, "How will England's cause be best served?" Always I have asked myself, "How will the International Socialist movement be best served?" That, I take it, is the true internationalist attitude.

Internationalism is not anti-nationalism. Internationalism presupposes nationalism. It is the interrelation of nations. The maintenance of national integrity and independence is an essential condition of internationalism. This principle has not been seriously called into action in our move-

ment hitherto. It has been the guiding principle of our policies. That is why we have always stood by the small nationalities in their struggles for independence. We have supported the people of Ireland, of Finland, of Poland, of Bohemia, of India, in their struggles for national independence. Now, we are asked to abandon historic Socialism and accept the doctrine that national independence and integrity is worthless, if not positively wrong, and that the workers do wrong to defend it. Of course, this propaganda admirably serves the purposes of aggressive military powers.

When I came to this country of my own volition, because it appeared to me to offer greater opportunities for my work than did the land of my birth, the rights and advantages I then acquired carried with them certain obligations to the nation; and when later I took the oath of citizenship I do so without any reservation whatsoever. I repudiate the claim that loyalty to this nation is inconsistent with true internationalism. Loyal support to this nation in the present war is coincident with loyalty to the fundamental institutions without which there can be no Socialist organization of the world. The issue is not loyalty to a ruler or to a government, but to the fundamental institutions of American democracy, which, however imperfect, is the most advanced yet developed anywhere in the world.

Withdrawal from the Socialist Party is not an easy matter for me. For more than a quarter of a century, ever since my boyhood, I have been in the ranks of the organized Socialist movement. In it are centered nearly all of my friendships and severance from it virtually means the beginning of life all over again. If I could have retained my

intellectual integrity and self-respect and avoided the sacrifice which I needs must make, I would have done so. With the greatest possible reluctance I have been forced to the conclusion that I can not honestly remain in the party.

I hope still to find opportunities to work for Socialism. Through the Intercollegiate Socialist Society and such other channels as are open to me, and free from Socialist Party control, I shall continue to expound Socialist principles as I have done for many years past. I shall work for the advancement of actual Socialist measures in whatever ways I find open. And if, as I hope, among the thousands of comrades who have left the party in the past 5 or 6 years there shall develop a new organization, free from the narrow dogmatism and still narrower tactics which have crippled the Socialist Party, I shall join it and do my share to make it successful.

William Morris wrote 33 years ago: "I can not yet forego the hope of our forming a Socialist party which shall begin to act in our time, instead of a mere theoretical association." I believe the time has come for such a party. Conditions are ripe for a reorientation of the Social Democratic forces of the country upon a sound program of democratic public ownership, which will appeal to all who are desirous of aiding to establish industrial democracy. Any movement to that end will have my full support and cooperation.

With kind regards and good wishes,

Very sincerely yours,

*John Spargo.*

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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