
Who is Splitting the Party?

An Editorial in the *New York Communist*, May 1, 1919.

by John Reed

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Attributed to editor John Reed.

The chief accusation against the Left Wing is that it is attempting “to split the party.” This is the burden of every Right Wing attack upon us; like “Bolshevism” in the capitalist press, it covers a multitude of sins. This charge has been hurled at every individual or group who has dared to differ with the party “leaders” or protest against their stultifying tactics.

During the bitter fight between Industrial Unionism and AF of L-ism, those who stood for revolutionary labor organization were reviled as “separatists” and “disrupters.” The adoption of Article 2, Section 6 in the party constitution by the Right Wing, drove the revolutionary elements out of our party, separated it from the class-conscious workers, and threw it into the arms of the petite bourgeoisie.†

The result of the internal strife at that time was the expulsion or resignation of a great number of revolutionary socialists from the party and its complete surrender to “moderate socialism.” But the St. Louis Convention of 1917 removed Article 2, Section 6 from the constitution, proving that the rank and file realized what a disastrous course the party had taken.

We, the Left Wing, representing the vast majority of the rank and file — who, no matter if at times they have been confused by the miserably

tricks of the party politicians, are soundly revolutionary by instinct — we have profited by the lessons of the past. We have no intention of being forced out of the party by the Right Wing. We have no intention of “splitting the party;” not because we are afraid of a split — for on a question of principle it is better to split and keep on splitting rather than compromise with reaction — but because we intend to capture the party machinery and mold the American movement into an effective weapon with which to fight the battles of the working class.

It is for this purpose that we have formulated a program and a set of principles, definitely opposed to the outworn principles and program actuating the present party “ruling class;” this is why we have joined in the call for an Emergency Convention, in which we can state our position, discuss it in open socialist debate within the ranks of the party, and finally, register the decision of the rank and file by means of the regular party machinery.

To this perfectly legitimate course of action the Right Wing, in control of the Executive Committee of Local New York, opposes brutal strong-arm tactics.

Hundreds of workingmen who want to join the party are held up while a “committee” of mis-

†- **Article II: Membership. Section 6:** Any member of the party who opposes political action or advocates crime, sabotage, or other methods of violence as a weapon of the working class to aid in its emancipation shall be expelled from membership in the party. Political action shall be construed to mean participation in elections for public office and practical legislative and administrative work along the lines of the Socialist Party platform.

erable socialist politicians catechizes them to find out if they have Bolshevik tendencies. As soon as a branch has a Left Wing majority and takes action to re-elect its delegates to the Central Committee, a minority of the “Old Guard” is empowered by the Executive Committee to “reorganize” that branch, expelling most of the members, locking up the branch headquarters, carrying off the furniture, and beating up delegates who protest. In carrying out these measures, the Right Wing do not hesitate to appeal to the police for help. The 17th AD Branch has already been “reorganized” in this manner; out of more than four hundred members, only 32 have been accepted as orthodox enough to remain. The same action is being taken with regard to the 18th-20th AD Branch as we go to press. In all this there is not the slightest trace of legality. Gerber openly says that he doesn’t care whether it is legal or not. His letter on another page of this issue will provide further illumination to the comrades.

Who is splitting the party — we, the Left Wing, who have announced our open intention of capturing the party by means of the majority vote of the delegates of the rank and file in Party Convention assembled? Or the Right Wing in New York, which is disrupting branch after branch, disenfranchising hundreds of comrades, by illegal action of the Executive Committee? The Executive Committee has indefinitely suspended

the meetings of the Central Committee, a superior body, because the branches were electing a majority of Left wing delegates to that body. And behind closed doors the Executive Committee functions, hurling bulls of excommunication against all branches in which a Left Wing majority appears.

The fundamental difference between Left and Right Wings is summed up in the question of which International shall the American Socialist Party join. The Left Wing declares clearly for the Communist International, the Third International summoned by Lenin; all the sympathies and connections of the Right Wingers are with the bankrupt Second International, which has played havoc with European Socialism much in the same way that the Right Wing has played havoc with the American Socialist movement.

These petty dissolutions and “reorganizations” of branches in Local New York, these callings upon the police for help in internal party differences, these suspensions of the Central Committee meetings, are perhaps in themselves of little importance in the world socialist movement. But they are symptomatic of graver things. They point with fatal logic to the attitude of the Majority Social Democrats in Germany, who, in time of revolution, instead of calling upon the police for help, turned loose Noske and his machine guns against the Spartacides.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.

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