
The Executive Committee's Statement: A Response to the Comminque Issued by the EC of Local New York, Socialist Party, May 8, 1919.

by Maximilian Cohen

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The following letter was sent to the New York Call in answer to the Local Executive Committee's ukase which was published in that paper. In spite of its belief in the freedom of the press, which led it to publish such letters as Shaplen's defense of Kolchak, The Call refused to publish this letter, which is one side of the controversy now raging within the Socialist Party.

Editor of *The Call*:

Permit me to answer the statement issued by the Executive Committee of Local New York, and printed in today's issue of *The Call* [May 8, 1919], pertaining to the Left Wing controversy. In view of the illegal acts, and in view of their statement which is nothing more than a tissue of lies concocted for the purpose of fooling the membership as to the actual situation, I feel that you will be fair enough to grant me space in which to reply.

In the first place, the Executive Committee is absolutely without any authority to reorganize any branches in New York, until the referendum issued by the State Committee has been passed, and then they not only have that right but also the right to automatically expel them. *Why then does the Executive Committee proceed to deprive branches of the right to vote on this referendum by "reorganizing" them now?*

Their only semblance of an excuse for their wholesale "reorganizations" is that at "the last [New York City] Central Committee meeting, Comrade Karlin, who was not chairman, moved that, when the Central Committee adjourns, it adjourn subject to call by the Executive Committee, and that the Executive

Committee be empowered and instructed to reorganize Local New York and put it on a working basis. This motion was adopted." *This is a deliberate lie.*

No such motion was ever put, much less carried. For one reason, the meeting had been adjourned by the chairman; secondly, the room was in an indescribable turmoil with a police captain driving the delegates out. What really occurred — and this will be corroborated by most of the unbiased members and delegates present — was that during the height of the confusion Comrade Karlin, after consultation with the group around him, suddenly arose and cupping his hands over his mouth shouted above the din that there would be no further meeting of the Central Committee until the Executive Committee decided to call for same. We noticed the recording secretary writing furiously at this time and predicted among ourselves that they would claim that this motion was passed. As a matter of fact it was a physical impossibility for anyone either to put a motion or have the vote counted. Fights were going on simultaneously all over the hall. Members and delegates mingled indiscriminately, voices were shouting, hisses and epithets, and *they* have the audacity to claim that such a motion was passed at this time! Why, in their sheet, *The Socialist*, they went further and purported to give the exact vote by which this motion was passed — 71 to 36 are the figures given. *This then is their basis for the "Reorganization" methods.*

I leave it to the comrades to judge the merits of their case.

In their statement they give an account of the rupture in the 17th AD [Assembly District], showing

how it led up to the filibuster at the last Central Committee meeting. Aside from misstating the facts, distorting others, and omitting important ones, it is a fairly accurate account. The Executive Committee does not state why a branch could not withdraw and elect officers and delegates the same night, although there is nothing in the bylaws prohibiting such action. The bylaws only relate to the annual nominations and elections. In recalling delegates and officers, the clause says nothing about such procedure. *As a matter of fact this has been the procedure for years!* But when the Left Wing became a factor in the 8th AD, and had an overwhelming majority in the branch and they proceeded to use their legitimate power to recall those pets of the Right Wing Machine, [Louis] Waldman, [Algernon] Lee, and [Anita] Block, and elected three Left Wingers in their place, the Central Committee refused to seat the new delegates on the grounds that a special meeting should have been called, nominations made, then and elections at the next meeting. The Left Wing in the 8th AD, sure of their majority, complied with the unfair ruling, and at a subsequent meeting, having duly notified the members of the branch, recalled the old delegates and nominated new ones. Elections were held at the following meeting.

Now, then, the 17th AD, realizing that if they recalled and elected delegates on the same meeting night they would be subject to the same treatment, and further realizing that their normal majority would be sure to be diminished by the colonizing of their opponents, decided to recall all their officers and delegates (excepting 3), all to act, however, until new elections took place. The first meeting was packed by the Rights and the motion to recall was lost by 9 votes; at the next meeting they succeeded in recalling them (with the stipulation referred to above). They could have elected new officers and delegates right then, if they were so minded, so the charge that they wantonly dissolved the branch is pure bunk. They merely wanted to make sure that the Central Committee would seat their delegates.

The Right Wing was faced with the immediate loss of their majority in the Central committee. Action, and quick action, was necessary. Other branches were in the process of recalling their delegates and electing Left Wingers in their places. With the exception of the Finnish Branch (counterrevolutionary and so-

cial-patriotic in all their actions for the past year and a half), most of the language branches were going to the left. I mention these facts to show the desperate situation the Right Wing was facing. What did they do?

Comrade Julius Gerber (whose heart was bleeding with righteousness and wrath), issued a secret call for an organization meeting of his trusted cronies on Monday, April 21st, at his office. In his letter (published in full in the *New York Communist*, May 1st), he says, "Tuesday evening, the Central Committee meets. At this meeting *the die will be cast as far as Local New York is concerned.*" Further on he continues, "I have for myself decided as to my course and my action." At this secret meeting this gang decided to push through by hook or by crook, the concurrence by the Central Committee with the action of the Executive Committee, in illegally reorganizing the 17th AD, with methods that would put the Tammany machine to shame. The only thing lacking now was official sanction by the Central Committee. Then they could sanctimoniously claim that the entire action was legal and binding. That this was but the prelude to a series of wholesale such "reorganizations" we were certain, and I openly charged them with it in the Central Committee, which they dared not refute.

It is true that the Left Wing delegates had a "steering committee" and we never hid that fact; in fact we openly stated so, and even gave I. Phillips and Gerber copies of our rules. We entered the meeting at 10 minutes after 8 and found, contrary to the usual custom, most of the delegates in their seats and the meeting already opened; that meetings were never opened before 8:15 is a well-known fact. We were surprised, but on the vote for chairman realized that the meeting was packed and something was to be jammed through. We were not wrong in our surmise, when immediately after Comrade Lee blossomed out as a delegate from the 16th AD (after having been repudiated by his own branch), Comrade Gerber called off the credentials of delegates from the illegally "reorganized" 17th AD. Cries from all over the house for the reading of the credentials from the legitimate branch caused that worthy to bow to the storm. He read them apologetically and with sneers. Thereupon, as prearranged, Comrade Beckerman rose, was granted the floor, and moved that the Central Committee concur with the

action of the [city] Executive Committee in “reorganizing” the 17th AD.

Granted the floor next, I moved an amendment that a committee of 7 be appointed from this body, 3 from the Right, 3 from the Left, and an impartial chairman selected unanimously, who should investigate the case of the 17th AD and report back to the Central Committee at the next meeting. This amendment, eminently fair and just, was defeated. Later on, when I appealed to the delegates to hear a committee of 3 bearing credentials signed by 96 members of the 17th AD, my appeal was again lost. *Did not this prove that the Right Wing was out for its pound of flesh?*

So much for events. Now let us analyze their theoretical position, viz.:

Do not be deceived. The question at issue is not merely one of revising our party's platform or its tactics. Differences of opinion on these matters are always in order. The constitution and bylaws of the party give ample opportunity for discussing such questions and deciding them by the will of the majority. Your Executive Committee has neither the right nor the desire to interfere in such matters. On the contrary, it is striving to maintain the normal conditions for free and fair discussion and decision.

This quotation is from their statement in today's *Call* [May 8, 1919]. It sounds plausible. To the uninitiated it may even seem eminently fair. But is it? Let us see.

Any sane Socialist knows that the organization of the Left Wing was due to the inertia and actual blocking by the officials of every attempt of the rank and file to express itself ever since the St. Louis Resolution was adopted by the rank and file [April 1917]. Permit me to enumerate them chronologically: (1) The Meyer London renomination; (2) The Socialist Alderman and the Third Liberty Loan; (3) The Socialist Aldermen and the Fourth Liberty Loan; (4) The socialist Aldermen and the Victory Arch appropriation, to say nothing of every attempt to consolidate the locals of Greater New York being blocked by the officialdom. To say nothing of the resentment of the rank and file against the *New York Call's* attitude towards the Bolsheviks in Russia and the Spartacans in Germany, which again was crushed by the officialdom, without redress by the members because *The Call* is not party owned or controlled.

These well-known incidents give the *lie direct* to their claim that the regular party channels are open.

Slimily and hypocritically they prate of petty platforms and tactics not being the main issue; giving the impression that they are in favor of a radical revision along the lines laid down in the Left Wing Program. Here we must call Comrade Gerber and Comrade Waldman to testify. Comrade Gerber in his letter to his cronies, for that secret meeting before the Central Committee meeting of April 22nd, lets the cat out of the bag; he says: *“while the control of the party by these irresponsible people will make the party an outlaw organization, and break up the organization.”* And yet what would these “irresponsible people” do? Merely carry out the letter and spirit of the Manifesto and Program within the party. Get that! What has Waldman to say on this subject of revision of party policies and tactics? The following, delivered in a speech in the Bronx [April 4, 1919] and reprinted in the current issue [May 6] of *The Socialist*, the official organ of the Right Wing:

Industry must be under collective ownership. If an industry is municipal-wide, the municipality is the collectivity which is going to be possessed of the ownership of that industry. If an industry is statewide in its nature, the state is going to be possessed of that industry. If an industry is national in character, such as railroads, waterways, coal mines, telegraph and telephones, the nation will own it.

This is the kind of Socialism advocated by the Right Wing. They talk about revising party policies and tactics quite glibly, but only with the intention of sidetracking the revolutionary sentiment of the rank and file, who are clamoring for a thoroughgoing change on the basis laid down by the Left Wing Manifesto and Program. They do not wish to revise the party's policies and tactics if they can help it; certainly they are not for the abolition of social reform planks; they are not for repudiating the Second International, they are not for affiliating with the Third International, called by the Communist Party of Russia (Bolsheviks). They are not for making revolutionary industrial unionism a part of its general propaganda. The quotation from Waldman's speech distinctly states what their conception of Socialism is: nothing more or less than State Socialism in its most pernicious forms. They believe in preserving the capitalist state and utilizing it for the inauguration of Socialism. They are opposed to the “dictatorship of the proletariat” as a principle and violently opposed to it

as the tactic of revolution. *They are the exact counterparts of the Ebert-Scheidemann moderate Socialists of Germany.*

Bourgeois parliamentarism is their means and State Socialism is their goal.

Comrades! The Left Wing organization is the organization of the rank and file. It is your answer to the politicians, the officials, the traitors and the betrayers in our party, who seek to maintain themselves and their clique in control, despite the fact that the membership clamors for new policies, new tactics, new spokesmen.

Now a word as to the heinous crime of having an “organization within an organization.” The Right Wingers claim that the rank and file have no control of such an organization. *Our answer is that the rank and file have control, but the machine politicians have not.* That is why they are opposed to it so bitterly. But let us put the question this way: Have the rank and file an opportunity of controlling “organizations outside of the organization,” such as the *New York Call* and the Rand School?

We accuse them of having organized “organiza-

tions outside of the organization,” which are most harmful to the socialist movement. We accuse the Right Wing of controlling them and seeing to it that the rank and file have no say in their management, ownership, or control. Is the “red card” [SPA membership card] *per se* an open sesame to those outside organizations?

The charge has been made in the official organ of the Right Wing, *The Socialist*, that the Left Wing is the only organization where the red card is not honored. That is not true. The fact is that The Call Association and the Rand School, claiming to be Socialist institutions, are two places where the red card is not honored.

In view of the facts enumerated, in view of the deliberate distortions and lies published in the Executive Committee’s statement, the members of the Socialist Party should demand the recall of the Executive Committee [of Local New York], the resignation of the Executive Secretary [Julius Gerber], and vote “No” on the State Committee’s referendum for the expulsion of Left Wing locals and branches.

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Edited by Tim Davenport.

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