
Draft of a Supplemental Appeal to the Executive Committee of the Communist International from the Socialist Party of America, circa March 12, 1920. †

by Otto Branstetter

A document from the *Papers of the Socialist Party* (Duke University Collection), microfilm reel 9.

G. Zinovief

Dear Comrade:—

In connection with our formal application for affiliation with the Communist International which accompanies this communication, it is perhaps desirable that I state at some length the position which our organization has maintained before, during, and since the participation of the United States in the world war.

At the outbreak of the war in Europe, the Socialist Party immediately took the position that it was fundamentally a war for commercial supremacy in which the working class of the various European countries had no interest. We urged the necessity of the American Government remaining neutral, denouncing the munition manufacturers for furnishing munitions, and advocated an embargo on all foodstuffs in order to starve the belligerents into an early peace. We demanded that our government use its good offices at every

opportunity to bring about the cessation of hostilities and set forth as early as May 1915 the basis upon which peace should be made.

The Proclamation of the National Executive Committee [May — 1915] setting forth terms of peace, included the proposals for the abolition of secret diplomacy and the demand for no annexations or punitive indemnities, afterwards honestly adopted and made famous by our Russian comrades and hypocritically included by President Wilson in his Fourteen Points.

In connection with these efforts, we of course carried on a continuous anti-militarist and anti-imperialist [~~campaign of~~] agitation. When, in spite of our efforts, the American government entered the war, we held an Emergency Convention at St. Louis, April 7th-14th, 1917, in which we adopted the Declaration and War Program. This [~~resolution~~] [declaration] provided for [~~our unflinching and unceasing~~] [continuous and public] opposition to the war and [~~the~~] [that] position was maintained to the best of our ability throughout its

†- No copy of this document is known to exist in the archives of the Communist International. It seems extremely unlikely that any copy was ever sent. SPA Executive Secretary Otto Branstetter, a close political associate of outgoing Executive Secretary Adolph Germer, was an advocate of the defeated “Majority plank” on international affiliation, which called for a conference leading to the formation of a new International, to which would be invited a wide range of political parties including among them the Russian Bolsheviks, rather than the affiliation of the Socialist Party to the Comintern. Rather than making the strong pitch for inclusion outlined here, Branstetter submitted a tepid and pro forma request for inclusion, certain to be immediately rejected. He thus elected to comply with the letter but not the spirit of the SPA’s approved “Minority plank” on international affiliation, which called for the Socialist Party of America to immediately join the ranks of the Communist International, with some reservations.

Additions to this typewritten draft document made by hand are designated with square brackets; deletions are shown as struck-through text inside of square brackets.

duration. There were [~~of course,~~] some elements in our party in this country, as in all others, which became social patriotic and demanded that the Socialist Party support the government in its war measures. I am proud to say that this element in the American Socialist Party was comparatively small and that the St. Louis Resolution was adopted by an overwhelming majority in the referendum vote.

Some more or less prominent comrades, including John Spargo, A.M. Simons, Charles Edward Russell, Allan Benson, and the *Appeal to Reason* staff, either withdrew from the Party or were expelled on account of their opposition to the Party's position. The number of those who followed them out of the Party was insignificant and the rank and file of our membership stood unswervingly by the organization and its declarations.

That the National Party officials were no less loyal and devoted and steadfast in maintaining the position of the Party is proven by the fact that the National Executive Secretary, the editor of our official organ, the manager of our Literature Department, [and] the Secretary of the Young Peoples Socialist League were convicted and sentenced to twenty years each under the Espionage Act.

The National Executive Committee at that time consisted of fifteen members. Four members of this committee were convicted and served or are now serving sentence ranging from one to twenty years. Another member, Victor Berger, was convicted along with the four party officials mentioned above and received a sentence of twenty years, which is now pending before the Court of Appeals. The Executive Secretary was indicted and tried on another charge prior to the trial in which he was convicted. Comrade Berger has four other indictments against him and still another member of the committee was also indicted.

The number of state and local party officials who were convicted throughout the country is proportionately large.

In view of this record and of the published resolutions of the National Executive Committee throughout the war, dealing with both the domestic and foreign situation, accusations that the Socialist Party of the United States was reactionary, chauvinistic, or social patriotic is a deliberate and willful misrepresentation of the facts. I have the pleasure of enclosing copies of various proclamations and manifestos adopted by our organization both in convention and by action of the National Executive Committee from August 1914 until the present date.

The Socialist Party of the United States is justly proud of this record. It [~~is the only party in any of the belligerent countries which~~] steadfastly maintained a position in opposition to the war and the policies of its government. In [~~all~~] other countries the Socialist Party was split and the majority factions supported their respective governments while only the minorities were opposed. In the United States, not only was the majority in favor of the true international position, but the entire party was. The few individuals who left the Party on account of our St. Louis Declaration [~~and our attitude following that convention~~] were not of sufficient number or importance to constitute a split. Our Party was solidly united in support of our organization and its declarations.

There was no split in the American Socialist Party on account of or during the war. The split in this country occurred a year after the signing of the armistice [~~and~~]. [T]he seceding [~~of~~] [or] insurgent elements was largely composed of comrades who had never been affiliated with the Socialist Party until after the signing of the armistice and of those who, though affiliated, were conspicuously silent and inactive during the war.

Suffice it to say that the Socialist Party of the United States and its officials, now denounced by the leaders of the Communist and Communist Labor Parties as traitors and reactionaries, is the same party and its officials and leaders are the same men who adopted the St. Louis Declaration

and following resolutions and who maintained the active party work and agitation during three years of persecution and black reaction.

I trust that you and other members of your committee, and the comrades generally, will take these facts into consideration [~~before passing adverse judgment upon our party. Certainly~~] [T]he record of the Socialist Party of the United States is remarkable for its consistency and revolutionary character. The personal record of its officials from the time we entered the war until the signing of the armistice is [~~unquestionably~~] far superior to that of the alleged revolutionary leaders who sprang into prominence and activity only after the signing of the armistice when [~~they supposed that~~] [, presumably,] there was no particular danger attached to such activities.

The fact that the most prominent and influential leaders in the recent split have fled to safety in foreign countries, while their deluded and deserted followers [~~were~~] [are] being thrown into jails and penitentiaries by the thousands, is

significant of the caliber and character of those leaders. On the contrary, the leaders of the Socialist Party have been in the forefront of the fight since the beginning. They have not shirked responsibility or its consequences. They have not run away to seek safety for themselves and let the government vent its hatred upon obscure and unknown members. They have made and will continue to make the fight for international socialism [~~with unswerving courage and the willingness~~] [openly and with *<illeg.>* They will continue] to endure [courageously] whatever persecution or punishment they receive for the sake of their principles [in order to solidify and inspire the movement].

Yours for International Socialism,

Executive Secretary.

OB:EL

*Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.
Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2005. • Free reproduction permitted.*