
Where Do We Stand?

by “David Damon”
[C.E. Ruthenberg]†

Published in *Socialist News* [Cleveland], vo. 4, whole no. 182 (May 25, 1918), pg. 1.

From various sources the demand is heard that the Socialist Party hold a national convention and revise the St. Louis declaration in regard to the war. Some of these demands, notably those coming from people outside the party, frankly ask the reversal of the party position. Others call for revision, but these are merely less frank, for revising at this time cannot mean less than reversal. All of these attacks upon the party's stand are, of course, being exploited by the capitalist press for the purpose of creating confusion in the Socialist ranks.

As the Executive Committee has pointed out in its excellent statement in regard to these proposals, a national convention, at this time, would be a very one-sided affair. Unless we follow the custom of our Russian comrades during the reign of the Tsar, and hold the convention in some other country — in Mexico, perhaps, or possibly we could extract an invitation from the comradeship of Zapataland, that new paradise of which we have recently caught a vision — those who opposed the reversal of the party's declaration and introduced or voted for a declaration embodying their view might find themselves in jail for 20 years thereafter.

Under the amended Espionage Law a frank, open discussion of the Socialist attitude toward the present war is impossible without risking its extreme penalty, and since those who favored the party taking a position of “no compromise” could not participate effectively in the work of a convention, its declaration would manifestly not be representative of the party.

While a free discussion of the matter is not possible, the examination of the basis of the argument for reversal, so far as that may be done, is of interest. Usually its source is German aggression against Russia. The stripping of the Republic of the Soviets of a large part of its territory and its people and the continued attack upon it, even under terms of peace have been agreed to — this, it is argued, warrants a reversal of the declared position of our organization.

The irony of this argument becomes apparent when we consider the attitude of the Russian workers, who are being stripped of their territory and against whom the German outrages are being committed. They did not find in their situation a reason for casting the principles of International Socialism to the winds. In their reply to President Wilson they reaffirmed their faith in these principles and urged the workers of every country to take the same position.

The position of the Russian Socialists is not something new. It was the accepted view of the Socialists of all countries before the war began. It is based on the fundamental principles of the Socialist Movement. We said before the beginning of the Great War that certain forces innate in the capitalist mode of production were driving it toward a world calamity; that these forces would continue in operation as long as capitalism itself remains in existence, and that the hope of the future was an internationally united working class, which would use its power to bring into existence a new social order founded upon Socialist principles.

No government involved in the world war has

†— At the time of the publication of this article, Ruthenberg was in the midst of serving a one year jail term under the Espionage Act for a May 1917 speech which was said to have obstructed the draft. This marks the first known instance of Ruthenberg's use of the pseudonym “David Damon,” which he used extensively from early 1920, when the Communist Party of America was driven underground by police repression.

thus far proposed the abolition of the capitalist system except that of the Russian workers. What is proposed is a rearrangement of territory, and — by President Wilson — the organization of a League of Nations to reduce the possibility of future conflicts among nations in which the capitalist system will remain intact.

The Russian workers have by their actions expressed the view that what they consider essential in the settlement of the war is not whether Courland, Livonia, or Ukraine, or some other territorial unit, is placed under the sovereignty of this or that government, but the abolition of the capitalist system by the united workers. They realize that the control of certain territory by the German autocracy is a temporary matter, which will be wiped out if the workers are successful in uniting internationally against capitalism. To be sure, their first effort to arouse the Socialists of Germany to unite with them in their fight against autocracy and capitalism failed, but, as Liebknecht pointed out in an article recently printed by *The Class Struggle*, revolutions are not decreed by parties or persons for a certain date, but are the spontaneous movements of peoples when conditions are ripe. For the German Social Democracy to decree a revolution at a certain time would be silly. That does not mean, however, that a revolution of the German workers, of which the Social Democracy will be the leader, will not yet take place.

The Russian workers are not interested in the

reorganization of a capitalist world, but are pledged to unite the workers to reorganize the world in accordance with Socialist principles.

Can those persons who are loudly urging the Socialists of this country to reverse their position promise that the result of such action will bring them nearer the goal of Socialism — the abolition of capitalism? Or do they argue that the principle upon which the Russian workers base their tactics — that is, International Socialism — and which were the general accepted Socialist principles before the war, have been proven to be wrong?

The goal of the Socialist Party is Socialism, not a reformed capitalism. Its tactics must be those that will bring about Socialism. If those who are advocating reversion can show that these proposals will help to establish Socialism, and are not merely personal views and predilections in regard to the war, which have no relation to a Socialist policy, then the party should be ready to listen to them. If they can not show that then their advice deserves no consideration.

To prove that Socialism will be attained, not by a working class movement fighting a class struggle for the reorganization of our industrial system, but through an alliance with the enemy we are fighting, that is the impossible task before those who are urging the party to change its position.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2011 • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.