
The Growth of the Left Wing

by Maximilian Cohen

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Revolutionary Socialism always had its exponents and champions in New York. Back in the old days before the war “rights” and “lefts,” “reds” and “yellows” lined up in their various branches and consumed lots of space in the Socialist press with their tactical differences and opinions.

But the world war and the betrayal of International Socialism by the dominant Social Democracies of Europe; the Russian Revolution and the rise of the Bolsheviki to power; our own entrance into the conflict; the defection of our movement with its lip-service to International Socialism and its petty bourgeois pacifism; and finally the social-patriotic acts of our party officials and spokesmen generally, created an intolerable situation which grew worse from day to day.

The rank and file, betrayed and outraged by its spokesmen, found every attempt to protest blocked by an entrenched machine, hard to reach and difficult to dislodge. It controlled the party machinery and press and had the active support of reactionary trade union elements who threatened to withhold financial assistance during political campaigns unless candidates suitable to these “leaders” were selected.

A general membership meeting called only after pressure had been exerted after the Aldermanic Delegation first voted on the Liberty Loan, found its actions nullified by Comrade [Julius] Gerber, suddenly springing some 12 o'clock rule long after the specified hour. The renomination of Meyer London found ev-

ery apologist for social-patriotism and every mouth-phrasing revolutionist lined up solidly for his renomination.

At the first party meeting to renominate, the reactionaries, sensing strong opposition, finally sabotaged the meeting into getting London down to face the charges personally. The next meeting found them down



in full force and they played their trump card. Meyer London was on the platform. It was presumed that he would answer questions or at least that the chairman would permit discussion, after which London could sum up and define his position. Nothing of the sort! The chairman granted him the floor and London proceeded to attack, malign, and insult every Socialist who did not agree with his out and out social-patriotic stand. He then left the hall immediately after; of course he was renominated by the party machine and the *Forward's* politicians, who

saw to it that the meeting was packed.

But the Central Committee of Local New York must ratify. The Central Committee at its regular meeting withheld ratification. So again the machine got busy and called a special meeting and by a vote of 42 to 38 reversed the decision of the previous meeting.

Then came another sensation. The Aldermanic

Delegation had flopped again on the Fourth Liberty Loan. The overworked machine got busy again and blocked and frustrated every attempt on the part of the rank and file to express their disapproval and take proper disciplinary action.

Lastly, and as fitting climax to their "activities," the Aldermanic Delegation voted for the appropriation for a Victory Arch and thus sank as low as it is possible to sink in the mire of social-patriotic mud.

Feeling ran high. The machine worked secretly and the Socialist press silently to defence the thrice-dishonored and guilty offenders. Under pressure of some members of the City Committee, a joint meeting of the Central Committees of the various locals of Greater New York was called to discuss the Aldermanic acts and recommend action to the various locals. Julius Gerber was elected chairman at this meeting. The chairman of the Socialist Aldermanic Delegation made a lengthy report of inconsequential and routine details which had nothing to do with the purpose of the meeting. He read a report that might have been in place at some grammar school class in elementary civics. It was insulting by the very absence of emphasis on the points which had to do with tactical differences and principles. He did slur over those points in the last 10 minutes of his report as if such matters were beside the question, of very little moment to Socialists, and needed no further amplification. After the report the chairman arbitrarily called for questions from the floor when the method of procedure should have been discussion upon a motion. Each question called for a lengthy answer by some member of the delegation and so the chairman steered the meeting safely up to about 11:30 or thereabout when some delegates woke up to the fact that they had been tricked out of full discussion and someone made a motion to close questions and start discussion. At this point some delegates from Queens, who claimed recognition under questions, were ruled out of order and they as a protest rose in a body and left. Immediately after the Kings Country delegates also rose in a body and left the hall as a protest against the all-too-evident attempt at whitewashing the Aldermanic Delegation by the

New York machine. Some New York delegates left with them; so did also a number of comrades in the rear of the hall.

These delegates and comrades crowded in the corridor and forced Comrade [George] Goebel to give them a meeting room, a thing which he at first refused to do. There the Left Wing Section had its birth as an organization. A committee of 14 was elected with power to draft a manifesto and bring our message to the rank and file. The committee drafted a temporary Manifesto and Program and called mass meetings in Kings, Manhattan, and the Bronx for party members only. Our manifesto was enthusiastically endorsed and our position backed up by the members present. I might add here that the *New York Call* refused even to print our paid advertisements announcing the meetings, although it is a well known fact that they permitted their solicitors to plead for Liberty Loan ads and from the Liberty Loan Committee and printed same in direct violation of the meaning and purpose of the St. Louis Resolution. But Left Wing ads were too dangerous forsooth! The readers of *The Call* might find out that there are some members in the Socialist Party who were and are opposed to the betrayal of Socialist principles by official spokesmen and official party organs.

However we managed to have our meetings well attended in spite of *The Call's* attitude and finally we called for an all-day convention for February 15th [1919]. It was one of the most enthusiastic meetings ever held in New York. On that day the Left Wing Section was formally launched, rules of organization adopted, and the Manifesto and Program revised for publication in pamphlet form. A City Committee and executive officers were elected. *The Revolutionary Age* was endorsed as our organ for the present and John Reed was chosen as New York Editor.

We are a well organized section within the Socialist Party of Greater New York and we are extending our activities to cooperate with all Left Wing locals throughout the country for the purpose of uniting our forces preparatory to making a nationwide drive for the capture of the whole party machinery.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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