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# Left Wing Are Disruptionists:

## A Letter to the Editor of *The New York Call*, March 12, 1919.

by Joseph Gollomb

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Editor of *The Call*:

This is the time for all good socialists to come to the aid of their party.

It is beset with enemies on all sides — and from within.

Least of all are we afraid of the capitalist pack. They are sending the leaders to prison. They are muzzling our press. They have banned our colors. They have shut us out from meeting halls. And the Socialist Party reports the largest membership in its history.

But before a new and yet ever old enemy now within our midst we have much to guard. It is the spirit and purpose of old Michael Bakunin and it is actively at work now within the party with all its old unscrupulousness and viciousness. It is clad in borrowed clothes and calls itself by an attractive name, “the Left Wing.” Their true name is the Disruptionist Wing.

But here are some facts about it:

It has been a lean year for anarchists and the IWW, who have been outlawed, and for the SLP, which has been dying since its break with the Socialist Party. There is no roof over their heads, no coal in their bins. The winter has been hard and cruel. They have appealed over and over again to the socialists for help. And the socialists, forgetting how in the past these people have vilified their party, have responded like comrades. Our press has given its space to their appeals and their trials. Our meetings have collected funds for them. Our speakers have agitated against the injustice meted

out to them. Old scores were forgotten by us. We saw only comrades in need and distress.

And the result? This: Word has gone out among the anarchists, IWW, and the dying Socialist Labor Party to note the one edifice that is weathering the storm — the Socialist Party. It still has a press, funds, <illegible>, the fruit of the patient, devoted labors of tens of thousands of Jimmie Higginses for a score of years. “Come on fellows! Let’s get together! We have much in common, we anarchists, IWWs, and SLPs, in our program. We all despise the Socialist Party as heartily as we like its shack. Let’s go to it!”

And they have.

They are flocking into our party not out of conversion, but with blackjacks behind their backs. They have organized a body within the party, with delegates from different branches, Central Committees, Executive Committees, State Committees, a National Committee, constitution, and membership cards, part for part with the organization of the party proper, with mandates on their members to be carried out at the meetings of the party. Nor are their less guarded members making a secret of their purposes, though some of their leaders do protest too much that theirs is “not a secessionist movement.”

I attended the organization meeting of this crowd. Although only red card holders were supposed to be admitted, I and other comrades saw people there whom we know never joined the party. Although this meeting was supposed to vote

on the organization of Local New York, there were many from Kings, Queens, Newark, and elsewhere. A “manifesto” was read, written in the main by a former SLP man [Louis Fraina] — the same man who in these columns a day or two ago gloated over the fact that the Communist Party of Russia has recognized the SLP and not the American Socialist Party. This “manifesto” set forth certain “demands.” None of these “demands” will be discussed by me here. And for this reason:

This organization comes and says: “We demand that you unqualifiedly endorse this and that!”

But this missionary is wearing brass knuckles on his hand, and there is a bulge about his hip pocket. There is only one thing for socialists to say to him:

“Our party is beset with the thugs of capitalism. Why is your face turned to us, rather than against them? Why do you pick this time to divert our attention and funds? Above all, what are you doing with the brass knuckles, the blackjack, and the gun — all aimed at us?”

And there is but one thing to do, unless we want to be overwhelmed. And that is, to reach for our own gun. Only when the other fellow puts away his thug’s outfit will we listen to his arguments.

When this group builds up within the party an organization exactly parallel to the party proper, it can mean but one thing. They say thereby, “If you people don’t like our program, we will be the party, willy-nilly. And here is the organization ready to hand.”

Which is exactly what one of the leaders of the movement stated at that organization meeting.

“I don’t see why the chairman is so careful to say that this is not a separationist movement within the Socialist Party,” says Nicholas Hourwich, one of the leaders in the Russian group. “If the Socialist Party likes our manifesto, we are the party. If not, our manifesto is dearer to us than party unity.”

There are witnesses to prove this and the following utterances.

Other speakers declared that the time was near when they, men and women of their thinking, would come to the killing point with “the Eberts and Scheidemanns” of the party. “Therefore, rather than let it come to that, let us throw them out of the party.”

Aside from the fact that the men they call the “Eberts and the Scheidemanns” in this country are being sent to prison by capitalist government for exactly the same offense for which the Kaiser sent Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg to prison, the use of popular names and catchwords is blood kin to the use of the flag and patriotism which is such a favorite device with the man who sells diseased meat to the soldiers.

“There is but one thing to do,” a speaker at that organization was saying.

“Break up the party!” shouted several voices.

We know their breed. Marx met it in Bakunin. The party in this country met it in Daniel DeLeon. The local in this city, about five or six years ago, met it in a group who talked and worked exactly as this crowd does. Many of us remember that gang in old Branch 7, the people for whom the party was not “radical enough,” was “too corrupt,” “too fossilized,” and so on and so on ad nauseum. We remember them — Walling, Robert Harrison, Slobodin, Sumner, Boyd, Bohn, Sol Fieldman. Where are they now? All in the camp of reaction, renegades. Right here is the place to expose the pretension of the group in calling itself the Left Wing. The official declaration of the Socialist Party, as expressed in St. Louis, has been accepted by the Zimmerwald Congress of the Left Wings of the socialist parties of Europe as being a thoroughly Left Wing statement. This expression was adopted by the party by an overwhelming vote and is still the considered opinion of the rank and file. In the face of this where is the sincerity of organizing a Left Wing movement here, with all the evidence of preparation for a *coup d’etat*, be-

fore even making an effort to propagandize within the legitimate channels provided by our party?

Many of their most popular “demands” have been adopted by the party already, and without their help. But it makes an effective front to demand what already has been granted. So these “demands” are kept for popular consumption.

But, as I have said, it is not their words one must ponder at this time — they are pretty enough in the main — but their manner, and the things they really mean. What these are, it is fair to deduce from the temper and performances of some of their leaders. In Local New York the most prominent are Nicholas Hourwich, for the Russian group; Flanzer, for the Jewish group; and Jim Larkin, for the English speaking group.

Hourwich’s caliber is shown by the quotation I have already given, by his obstructionist methods in the Central Committee of the local, and particularly by his reaction toward a clearly expressed majority resolution in the 2nd Russian Branch of Harlem, a resolution which Hourwich did not like and which, as an official of the Russian Socialist Federation, he proceeded to help to nullify in his own way. Although the motion was carried legally by a vote of 24 to 14, Hourwich was instrumental in causing the expulsion of the majority group from the branch and from the federation and in effecting the recognition of the minority as the branch proper. Subsequently, Local New York nullified that action. When accused in the Central Committee of Local New York of not only violating a majority’s decision, but of expelling them, Hourwich defended his position by saying, “We did not expel them as a group, but as individuals.”

Which is like a man defending himself against the charge of tearing out his wife’s hair by replying that he did not tear them out by the handful, but only one at a time. And, incidentally, it brings a new spirit into the Socialist Party — the spirit of the old Tammany genius, Tweed, at his slimiest.

Of a kin to it is the action which Hiltzik staunchly defended. As part of the work of the Disruptionist Wing, the 2nd Downtown Jewish Branch was found colonizing its branch with members from the Ukrainian Branch just before election. Some of these newcomers could understand neither English nor Jewish, as was reported by the committee sent to investigate the Jewish Socialist Federation and from Local New York. The branch is now being reorganized.

Most characteristic and forceful of all these leaders in the Disruptionist Wing is Jim Larkin of the 3rd-5th-10th AD, the branch to which I belong. And in describing the progress of the Disruptionist Wing in my branch I want to sound a warning as to what is happening in other branches. About a year ago the average attendance at our branch meetings was nearly 100. Since then, although the membership has nearly doubled, the attendance of our old members has dwindled to about one-third of that of a year ago. The cause is Jim Larkin, and the spirit he brought in with him. From the day of his entrance the branch learned what it was to hear other comrades called “yellow dogs,” “rats,” “corrupt,” to hear of a comrade: “He pleaded for his wife and children. But he neglected to say which wife he meant!”

We have learned what it is to have fist fights and brawls, bitterness and nerve-wracking controversies at our meetings. And we have learned what it means to stay, often ’til after 1 in the morning, and not get as far as the first part of routine business.

Worst of all, we have learned what it means to have a group of about 20 seize control of our branch, with its membership of nearly 300 in good standing, and with 7 delegates representing this group officially in the Central Committee commit the branch to an anarchist program. It was only by a vote of 16, led by Larkin, that a motion was passed suspending the constitution of the local as far as it applied to the branch.

It was only by the same vote that a Jimmy

Higgins of our branch was censured for bringing charges against one of Larkin's adherents in the branch. This man, who is being advertised in the newspapers as being the "only man who has successfully repudiated socialism" on the platform, was expelled by the Central Committee by a vote of 62 to 10.

Three members of the five of our Membership Committee declared that they would not oppose the admission of anarchists, as such, to the party. They are all Larkin followers, and, of course, active in the Disruptionist Wing. When a comrade, in sympathy with the whole manifesto of the wing, but loyal to the party, moved that the branch disapproved of the stand of the Membership Committee, the motion was lost, with Larkin followers defeating it.

A motion to support *The Call* in its appeal for a plant of its own was defeated. At the same meeting, however, \$25 was voted from the branch treasury for the work of the "Left Wing organization." My dues, which I pay for the work of the Socialist Party as a whole, are thus being diverted to the work of a faction within it.

And what is being done with this money of mine I have no means of knowing. For the councils of the Disruptionist Wing are secret. For the first time in the history of our party a body has adopted secrecy as its weapon. A session of the convention of this Disruptionist Wing held in New York a week or more ago excluded holders of red cards, members of the Socialist Party, from attending, although the money of some of these members is being spent by these gentlemen. Secrecy, a new spirit in our ranks! What does it argue?

How has this intolerable state of affairs come about?

In the answer lies the warning to the rest of our comrades who are not ready to surrender the structure they have reared with such patience, devotion, sacrifice, and love for so many years. It is simply that comrades who want to work, who have only human endurance, are driven away from meetings by those who, although they are in the minority, have all the time in the world on their hands, a Billingsgate tongue and the passion to use it; who have nothing to lose and everything to gain, and are willing to combine in order to gain their ends. Thus, out of 300 members of our branch, 20 control it. Out of 700 in the 17th AD, a group of 30 disruptionists are in power. The others have dinned, talked, shouted, harassed into staying away or into going away early in the evening, leaving the field clear for the others.

Comrades, what are you going to do about it?

If your party is not enough incentive for you to withstand this new enemy, then they are entitled to their victory, no matter what their purposes may be. If you are not willing to come to the meetings and stay to the end — and it is only necessary for loyal socialists to do that, and the Disruptionist Wing will fold itself up and steal away — then be prepared to see the spirit of old Michael Bakunin and of Daniel DeLeon win out at last against all that Karl Marx and millions of our comrades have labored and suffered to rebuild.

Fraternally,

Joseph Gollomb

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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