
An Answer to Moses Oppenheimer: Letter to the Editor of the *New York Call*, April 25, 1919.

by Israel Amter

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Editor of *The Call*:

A wail from the desert! A cry of despair! Victims of a holdup and assault!

This is about the substance of a complaint of [Moses] Oppenheimer and his conferrers regarding the treatment accorded them at a recent membership meeting of Local Bronx to discuss party policy.

These comrades seem unable to grasp the first elements of democracy. They complain that the meeting elected Dr. [Julius] Hammer to the chair for three consecutive sittings. It would appear obvious to anybody but a Right Winger that his constant re-election was due to the confidence of the assemblage in Dr. Hammer and to the democratic notion of majority rule. Or are chairmanships to be considered a reward for work in the party? True, Dr. Hammer has been in the party but a few months, and Oppenheimer for many years. But we are living in the present, and if the present membership prefers a live man to a bunch of reminiscences — which seems to be the substance of which Oppenheimer is made — it would appear to me to be a good omen. Or is Comrade Oppenheimer's disgruntlement due to the fact that he got no farther than a vice chairmanship?

However, it was very good that the minority retired from the hall, since their obstruction and dilly-dallying with the vital matter before the meeting speedily would have been put an end to. When Oppenheimer, in all sincerity and credu-

lity, presented a motion to elect a committee of 15 to study the resolution before the house, a resolution that was based on the discussions that had taken place during the previous membership meetings, he committed an act of insolence, to say the least.

After three meetings in which full discussion was indulged in; after the manifesto had been spread broadcast among the membership; after a presentation of the case on the opening evening by representatives of the three shades of opinion (Oppenheimer himself disporting himself in the Center, utilizing most of the time, however, in the narration of memories of his essential work in the Social Democracy of Germany, of his traditions, and of his having saved the party and *The Call* here in America); after the membership had become awake to the matter through the innumerable articles pro and con in *The Call* — after all this, Oppenheimer and his co-workers in preventing the assemblage from determining its own will, moved to hand the matter over to a committee of 15 for deliberation! Did they actually take us for children who had to be instructed in what was good and bad? If so, that was what these discussion meetings were for? Did they actually believe that as democrats we had to be directed in the policy to adopt? If so, why did the Right Wingers not present real arguments instead of sly insinuations?

It is true that, seriatim, the discussion did not proceed very far. A general outline of policy,

however, had been given by Comrade [Benjamin] Gitlow, and, in the main concurred in by Oppenheimer in his talk. As might be expected, it was attacked by [Louis] Waldman, who, however, left no marks of his brilliant taunts upon it. And it must be fully understood, as was emphasized at all the meetings by the Left Wingers, that the Left Wing manifesto and program are merely a basis upon which we can get together for revolutionary action. No claim is made that it is a perfect document — can anyone point one out? It is subject to amendment and will be amended. It is not to be swallowed whole, nor can it be crammed down anybody's throat. It is a presentation of old revolutionary truth as applied to the present situation, and subject to modification as conditions change. If Oppenheimer and his followers cannot comprehend that, then argument is wasted upon them.

It is true that the Left Wing was the powerful arm at the meetings. Would Oppenheimer suggest, then, that the majority submit to the minority? And if, as he stated, the chairman was sustained in all his [rulings...] (and whether he was right or wrong I believe an assemblage of many heads can decide better than Oppenheimer and his co-sufferers), was it not clear that the majority was made up of Left Wingers, who, therefore, had the right to have their own way? And they had it, despite the protest of several pro-war "Socialists" and various other live corpses emanating from the

past.

But when Oppenheimer so far forgets himself as to insinuate that we may have a repetition of the Russian spy system in the Left Wing, suggesting that there are men who will play a big part in its molding and guidance, only to sell it out or hand it over to the enemy, we can only say that, although he has mentioned no names, the implication is clear. In answer, we may state that it is better that we cast off all the old rubbish that clings to us as an obstacle today, to concentrate on the dangers that may confront us tomorrow. And, if we may be led to the shambles tomorrow by a traitor in our midst, treachery has already been practiced against us, and innumerable times, by those stalwart gentlemen who today call themselves leaders of the socialist movement in America and Europe — and still the movement has survived. And it is to clear them out — them and their futile logic and tactics and philosophy — that the Left Wing was formed. We shall not rest till the Socialist Party of America not only stands for, but lives up to, the revolutionary ideas that it originally propagated. We shall not rest till all the compromisers, surrenderers, and traitors have been swept out of the party. And do not forget that there are many more of this class in the party than left it in the wake of those arch-revolutionists, Russell, Spargo, Walling & Co.

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Edited by Tim Davenport.

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