
St. Louis and the Left Wing: Statement of Local St. Louis, June 23, 1919.

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Comrades:

We are told there is a crisis on in the Socialist Party. We read about Left Wing and Right Wing. We are told that a Left Wing had organized a "white card party" within the Socialist Party in the East. If we are correctly informed, the Left Wing organization in the Socialist Party started in February 1919. This was three months after the armistice was signed. While the World War was on we never heard of a Left Wing, nor of a Right Wing.

What is the turmoil about? What and who caused a Left Wing to come into existence? What causes a Left Wing to insist on having a Right Wing? In order that we might enjoy a disgraceful family row in our own ranks? That we might assist the capitalist class in its concerted efforts to break up the Socialist Party and annihilate the American Socialist movement?

What has the Socialist Party of the United States done to necessitate or justify such deplorable effects? Where and when has the Socialist Party become so hopelessly reactionary or "right wingish" to necessitate or justify the creation of an underground organization in the party? Why a Left Wing and the insistence on having a Right Wing?

Socialist Party and War.

When in August 1914 the World War broke out, suddenly and with all the disastrous effects and gigantic dimensions unprecedented in the

history of nations, the entire international movement was thrown into confusion. It was but yesterday when the Socialist comrades in every country held monster peace demonstrations and protested against war — and today, the moment the huge capitalist war machines were set in motion, the same Socialist comrades everywhere found themselves in a helpless, hopeless state of confusion. Too weak in time of peace to overcome the power of capitalism, the international Socialist movement was still more powerless when the hyenas of war were let loose.

The unexpected happened. In Germany and Austria, in England and France, in Russia and Italy, the majority of the Socialists were caught in the net of capitalist nationalism; they became jingoists and chauvinists and were made to believe that the World War was a struggle against Tsarism here, against Kaiserism there, and against autocracy and imperialism somewhere else.

True, in every war country there were some Socialists who were not swept off their feet by the formidable war wave, but they were hopelessly in the minority.

Effect on Movement.

Our American Socialist Party could not escape the immediate effects of the European situation caused by the World War. The fact that a considerable percent of our membership consists of foreign-born comrades made this even more manifest. Many thousands of our party members

suddenly forgot their internationalism and became pro-German or pro-British, pro-Austrian or pro-Italian, pro-entente or pro-central powers. They lost interest in the Socialist movement, many dropped their membership and embarked on the sea of capitalist nationalism.

There were other Socialist comrades — real, good, and reliable internationalists. They were so disheartened and shocked by the collapse of the international movement in August 1914 that they became pessimists; discouraged, almost heartbroken, hopeless they were. Many of them either left the party or remained passive, inactive card members.

This explains the discouraging state of affairs in our Socialist Party in 1914-15. There was nothing surprising about it in the eyes of those who could connect the causes and effect, who were able to discern the psychological, moral, and intellectual effects of the bloody world catastrophe.

True to Internationalism.

During all those days of discouragement, the Socialist Party of the United States remained true to the red banner of internationalism. Its record of the first 2 years of war was a record of revolutionary honor!

Then came the period of war preparations and “preparedness parades.” Again our Socialist Party, through its national executive officers and the affiliated state, county, and local organizations, showed its true Socialist colors and was not in the least afraid of leading in the opposition against war preparedness and war. Read the Socialist Party press of those days, especially *The American Socialist*. Refresh your memory and convince yourselves that there wasn’t any White Wing business about our party!

Stand of Convention.

Conscious of its great responsibilities and

mission as the political working class organization of the country, the Socialist Party called an Emergency National Convention, which was held in St. Louis during the first week of April 1917. The main object of this convention was to define the party’s position on the war question. Before the convention could be called to order, President Wilson, on April 4, read to the members of Congress his declaration of war against Germany.

When Comrade Morris Hillquit made his great opening speech to the convention delegates assembled at the Planters’ Hotel, our country was already in the war. Hillquit’s memorable address was a declaration of war — a revolutionary declaration! Never before had old Planters’ Hotel resounded with such genuine, sincere, and enthusiastic applause as at that opening session of that emergency convention! There was no right wing spirit in Hillquit’s keynote speech; neither was there in the storm of applause that greeted it.

Without “Right Wings.”

The St. Louis emergency convention adopted a war program, which has since become known as “The St. Louis Platform.” Not even the most radical of the radicals will claim that this platform has any right wing feathers; it is today an historic document. Future generations will read it with great interest.

You will find this platform in the Congressional Record; it was used as the main argument in favor of the Espionage Act. You will find this platform in the official proceedings of the court that sent Eugene V. Debs to jail for 10 years. You will find this platform in the official proceedings of the court that sentenced Kate Richards O’Hare to serve 5 years in the Jefferson penitentiary. You will find this platform in the official records of Judge Landis’ court in Chicago that blessed Comrades Adolph Germer, W. Kruse, Victor L. Berger, Louis Engdahl, and Irwin St. John Tucker with jail sentences of 20 years each.

Espionage Act and Party.

Comrades, you are acquainted with the Espionage Law. You know how this law has been used against our Socialist Party, against our Socialist press, against the entire Socialist movement.

Our Socialist papers were suppressed, held up for weeks and months. Entire editions were thrown into the big "wastebasket"; those of our papers which survived the ordeal are under censorship, deprived of second class mail privilege. Our national organ, *The American Socialist*, was suppressed. Our present national organ, *The Eye Opener*, is almost suppressed; the numbers being delivered as a rule do not reach the subscribers until two and three months after date of publication.

Our National Office was raided by the federal authorities, deprived of the United States Post Office service. Our National Executive Secretary [Adolph Germer] and the other employees of the party are prohibited from using the United States mail for party business. If they want to reach the membership of the party throughout the country, roundabout and indirect methods must be used, similar to the methods used by the Socialists in Prussia under the late Prince Bismarck.

Party Leaders Persecuted.

Because our comrades at the national Socialist Party office have been doing their duty as true, fearless, revolutionary Socialists, they are being persecuted. For alleged violation of the Espionage Act, Adolph Germer, National Executive Secretary, was sentenced to 20 years in jail. Comrade Irwin St. John Tucker, national lecturer and employee of the National Office, was sentenced to 20 years in jail. W. Kruse, National Secretary of the Young People's Socialist League, was sentenced to 20 years in jail.

If these comrades are accused of being "Right Wingers," we fail to understand how all the so-

called "Left Wingers" succeed in keeping out of jail....

We St. Louis comrades had neither time nor inclination to divide up into Left Wingers and Right Wingers. The work we have been doing in the last two years is real Socialist revolutionary work, Left Wing work, if you wish; but we do not pretend to be Left Wingers; neither are we ready to accept the name of Right Wingers. We prefer to do our duty without "wings," and Local St. Louis challenges any ultra-radical in our movement to point out another party local that has done more real, sound "Left Wing" work than our St. Louis comrades.

Conspiracy Against Party.

We need not mention any of the details of the anti-Socialist persecution during the last two years. Our political enemies believed that by any means of the Espionage Act they would soon have the Socialist Party down and out. When the armistice was signed our Socialist Party had a bigger membership than at the beginning of the war.

This was an unpleasant surprise for our capitalist enemies. For weeks and months they have been planning and conspiring against our movement. Socialism and Bolshevism are sweeping Europe. Social unrest and strikes indicate that conditions in our own country are not improving. Europe is absolutely bankrupt. The Big 4 peace conference has become a council of war — was against Soviet Russia and Soviet Hungary! Imperialism is running wild; it is getting desperate. The ruling classes are afraid of the growing strength of the Socialist movement. Hence the Socialist Party must be crushed! ...

Attempt to Destroy Party.

The capitalist class failed to break up our Socialist Party by attacking it from the outside and by vicious persecution. Attempts will now be

make to try the destructive work from the inside. There are many ways of procedure, which are best known to the secret agents and agents provocateurs.

It is unfortunate that at this most critical time, when the Socialist Party ought to show a united and solid front to resist the offensive of destruction launched by our common enemy, our organization should be checked and hindered in its work by a so-called Left Wing movement, and that a “white card” underground organization should be formed in the party. We can see neither rhyme nor reason in such a sideshow movement.

Case of Michigan.

The so-called Left Wing “party” in the party is moving very fast. In what direction? The very near future will furnish the answer. Since 1896 the Socialist movement of this country has had about half a dozen of similar Left Wing sideshows — and every one of them ended in fiasco! We remember the days when even Ex-Comrades A.M. Simons, Charles Edward Russell, [William English] Walling, [Graham] Stokes, and many others were “Left Winging,” and today they find themselves in the convent of St. Gompers under the political protectorate of Woodrow Wilson.

At its recent state convention, the Socialist Party of Michigan not only repudiated the national party platform and constitution, but openly and defiantly declared war on the entire national Socialist Party by adopting the following amendment to the state constitution:

Any member, local, or branch of a local, advocating legislative reforms or supporting organizations formed for the purpose of advocating such reforms shall be expelled from the Socialist Party. The State Executive Committee is authorized to revoke the charter of any local that does not conform to this amendment.

In plain English: The Socialist state consti-

tution of Michigan decides to expel any member or branch that defends, advocates, or accepts the national platform of the Socialist Party as adopted by the St. Louis emergency convention.

By this action Michigan automatically put itself outside of the Socialist Party of the United States. The National Executive [Committee] revoked the charter of the Michigan state organization. That was superfluous. All it should have done was to declare that the adoption of the above amendment to its state constitution meant the withdrawal of the Michigan state organization from the Socialist Party.

For instance: What business would Local St. Louis have in the Socialist party of the United States if it repudiated the party’s platform and threatened with expulsion each and every member who stands for that platform?

Language Federations.

The National Executive Committee also suspended the Russian, Lithuanian, Lettish [Latvian], Ukrainian, Hungarian, and South Slavic [Slovenian/Croatian] federations. Whether the suspension of these language federations was justified, the investigation by the National Convention will have to show.

The National Executive Committee has appointed a special committee to investigate the evidence upon which the suspension of these federations is based. This committee also stands instructed to investigate the alleged fraudulent practices in the recent referendum and report its findings to the special national convention, which will meet in Chicago beginning Aug. 30, 1919.

We learn that those charged with the alleged offenses are demanding referenda to set aside the action of the National Executive Committee. In our opinion such a move at this time would be unwise. Our members should not be expected to vote on a referendum without first having had opportunity of becoming acquainted with the evi-

dence as was presented to the National Executive Committee. It cannot be denied that such a referendum would be taken in ignorance of the facts in the case.

At the national convention on Aug. 30, 1919, at which all the states will be represented, the special committee will make its report, submitting the mass of evidence examined. The Michigan state organization and the suspended language federations will be heard. We advise our party members not to act on any proposed referendum in this controversy, and to await the action of the special national convention.

This advice is given on the ground that we want our members to act conscientiously and intelligently on a matter of vital importance to our party and to our movement. We heartily subscribe to the following sentence, quoted from the National Executive Committee's report on this controversy:

At a time when the party is hounded by the powers that be; when our spokesmen and officers are jailed; when our papers are suppressed; when our meetings are prohibited; this is the time when all our forces should stand together.

Stand of Local St. Louis.

We repeat: We cannot see any good reason for the so-called "Left Wing" movement in our Socialist Party. To charge our national officers with being Scheidemann-Socialists and "Right Wingers" is ridiculous. The only class that can gain by the Left Wing disturbance is the capitalist class that is organizing a nationwide campaign for the disruption and destruction of the Socialist Party.

Local St. Louis takes the ground that the Socialist Party must be a bona fide working class party, or it will cease to exist. We are not afraid of

accepting the program of the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat," but to bring this dictatorship about we are not willing or ready to lose ourselves in the nebulous regions of phrase-chewing ultra-radicalism and irresponsibility.

We appeal to the Socialists and class-conscious workers throughout the country to stand by the Socialist Party that has so nobly and courageously upheld the banner of true internationalism and working class interests during the most critical years in our country's history.

We appeal to our comrades everywhere to uphold our national platform and constitution, adopted by the St. Louis convention in April 1917, and sanctioned by referendum vote, until the next national convention, on Aug. 30, will have a chance to revise or remake platform and constitution in line with the changed economic and social conditions and the revolutionary situation created by the war.

Let us eliminate the entire "wing" business — Left and Right — and put our shoulders to the wheel in order that we may lead our movement to victory and success!

The above statement was adopted by the General Committee of the Socialist Party of St. Louis, representing 26 city branches and 3 county locals, after due consideration at two consecutive special meetings, held June 16 and June 23, 1919. It was decided to send the statement to the Socialist press. We ask the members of the Socialist Party throughout the country to carefully read and consider the position taken by our local.

By order of the General Committee, Socialist Party of St. Louis.

W.M. Brandt,
Secretary.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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