

A Criticism of The Revolutionary Age

By Adolph Germer

National Executive Secretary, Socialist Party.

IN the issue of *The Revolutionary Age* of March 8, you published an article entitled, "We Must Have a National Emergency Convention." That article contains several unfounded charges against the National Executive Committee and me in particular. I shall not assume to say that it was your wilful intention to convey false information. I will be tolerant enough to believe that you did it innocently, not thinking it necessary to go to the trouble of learning the actual truth.

It has been well said that "A lie will travel around the world while the truth is pulling on its boots." There is more truth than poetry in this, and when a person or group of persons set out to accomplish a purpose, it will help them materially to twist, garble and distort the facts. Somehow a falsehood sounds more romantic than the truth. But even so, a Socialist who has a sense of responsibility, in dealing with party affairs, should at least satisfy himself of the accuracy of a rumor before it is given out in print.

I am not given to making charges against members in the Party, but the entire article breathes the desire to create suspicion and distrust rather than to solidify our forces at a time when hundreds of our comrades are either in prison or facing prisons, and when the existence of our whole movement is challenged by the plutocrats.

It is a thousand times easier to circulate a falsehood, no matter how innocently done, and create distrust, than it is to instill confidence in the honesty and integrity of those who have been selected, wisely or unwisely, to administer the affairs of the Socialist Party. It seems to be human nature to believe that persons in official positions always have ulterior motives, than that they are actuated by sincere desires. There are also persons who regard it as a greater duty to carry on an internal quarrel, regardless of the consequences to the organized movement, than to consume their time, their capacity and energy, to enlist new converts to our cause. I have never had time for internal bickerings and would pay no attention to the effusions from *The Revolutionary Age* were it not that the propaganda is carried on so persistently.

You sneer at my "strict parliamentary procedure" and adherence to "constitutional law." And you give out the impression that we are cunningly thwarting the will of the membership.

The National Constitution of the Socialist Party is the will of the membership. It was adopted by referendum and laid down as the law to govern those whom they have elected to executive positions. You retreat behind the National Executive Committee's election of delegates to the International Conference, not stating to your readers that there was no time to elect by referendum vote. Besides, you fail to call to the attention of your readers the fact that the Constitution has the following two authorizing clauses:

Art. III, Sec. 1.—"The affairs of the Socialist Party shall be administered by the National Executive Committee, its sub-committee and officials, the National Convention and the general vote of the party." And,

Art. IV, Sec. 1.—"The duties and powers of the Committee shall be:

(a) To represent the party in all National and International affairs."

This too is the will of the membership, expressed by referendum when the Constitution was adopted. Why did you not call this to the attention of your readers?

Of course, the failure to state the extenuating circumstances and constitutional provisions is a minor matter; the all important thing is to give your readers the impression that the National Executive Committee and the National Secretary are an aggregation of official autocrats.

If the membership in its National Constitution, which is the fundamental law of the Socialist Party, says that a referendum must be initiated in a certain way, I presume that it is expected of us to have it so initiated and in no other manner, especially when the Constitution strictly provides that delegate bodies cannot initiate a national referendum. But what is a trifle like the Constitution (a mere scrap of paper) when the minds of the members are to be inflamed against party officials?

It is both interesting and amusing to see how the writer of the article, "We Must Have a National Emergency Convention," twists and places words to suit his purpose. When the National Executive Committee decided upon calling an Amnesty Conference, it was with no thought whatever of heading off a National Party Convention. The thought the committee had in mind was to arouse and combine every element in the country, that was interested in the subject of amnesty, and bring all possible pressure to bear upon the administration to compel the release of all war-time pri-

soners. Of course, it is the privilege of *The Revolutionary Age* to pride itself on "boycotting" such a conference and urge others to do the same. It is the privilege of *The Revolutionary Age* to bark at the moon while our comrades are languishing in filthy prisons. To some of our experienced comrades at least, it is agreeable that we should combine every element that can bring pressure to bear upon the Demo-

This is Germer!

National Executive Committee motion by N. E. C. member L. E. Katterfeld:

"That we reprimand the Executive Secretary, Adolph Germer, and instruct him under penalty of immediate recall from office, to cease interfering with the pending membership referendum regarding the National Convention."

Comment: Our Party Constitution provides that an official who interferes with the processes of the membership shall be recalled from office.

As an individual party member, Germer has the right to take part in debates on referendums. But he has no right to use the machinery of the National Office for that purpose.

He is sending two page official communications to Locals that endorsed the Boston resolutions, seeking to defeat the Convention referendum. He used the official Party Bulletin for the same purpose.

He left out of the Bulletin the report on N. E. C. motions No. 32 and No. 33 that I made regarding Japanese organizer and International Delegate, but printed his anti-convention argument instead.

Such reprehensible practices cannot be tolerated. This official chicanery must be rebuked.

Letter of N. E. C. member L. E. Katterfeld, to Adolph Germer, Executive Secretary of the Socialist Party:

You ask for a statement from N. E. C. members regarding the proposed Party Convention. You are entirely out of order. Are you not aware that Party officials are prohibited from interfering with the processes of the membership?

You claim to oppose the Party Convention on the ground of expense, but you favor an "Amnesty" Conference which in order to amount to anything would cost the Socialist Movement far more than a Party Convention.

I hold that we need a Party Convention not merely to show where our party stands in the present world crisis, but also to solve this very problem of financing our movement and building our organization.

You and the rest of the compromisers seem to be afraid to have the Party membership meet in Convention. You seem to know that they will surely repudiate all dickerings with bourgeois organizations and efforts to line up our party with pro-war patriots of other lands. In spite of your theatrical performance in denouncing the *Appeal*, when it comes to the real test of revolutionary Socialism you stand right with that gang against the uncompromising radicals within our own party. I can never forget your efforts at the St. Louis Convention to change our Party laws so that we could endorse and vote for all party politicians.

We do not need a mere "Conference" for you and reactionaries of our Party to confab with congenial spirits from "liberal" organizations. We need a membership Convention with power to act. Your hysterical efforts to prevent this convince me of its necessity right now. I hope that the membership will resent your official meddling and vote overwhelmingly for the Party Convention.

cratic Administration and force open the prison doors and regain freedom for the war-time victims.

You say, "The decision to hold an Amnesty Convention is an attempt to use the comrades whose adherence to party principles has landed them in jail as a means of defeating the wishes of the revolutionary section of the movement."

How do you know that? What proof have you to substantiate any such statement? As one who is on his way to prison and who approves of calling the Amnesty Convention, I brand such a charge as a pure and simple fabrication conceived by a fertile imagination and totally without warrant.

Here let me say that I am not in the least worrying about going to jail. Others have gone before me, others will go after me, and it is no worse for me to go than for the thousands of others who have gone or may still go. But such an absurd charge against the National Executive Committee will not go unchallenged.

You further say, "if the party convention so decides, ways and means can be found of co-operating with other organizations interested in amnesty." I shall be fair enough to believe that it was not trickery on your part to dish this out to your readers; that you sincerely feel that way. But let me ask—why delay the agitation for the release of political prisoners? Is it because "propagandists" are more interested in carrying on a discussion of purely party matters than they are in agitating for the release of our comrades in jail? If they are, again I say, it is their privilege. But I never felt justified in subscribing to such a doctrine.

Again you charge that when I advised the locals, branches and individual comrades that the Boston resolution could not be accepted as a motion for referendum, I informed such locals, branches and individuals, that the only motion properly initiated was from Local Queens County. And you add that you have been informed that at this late date I made an objection to the Queens County resolution. To me at least it will be interesting to learn who is peddling these falsehoods. What is the source of your information? Please reveal it. The fact that the ballots for a convention will be shipped out in the next few days, will serve, I hope, as an emphatic denial of your claim. I challenge you or anyone else to tell your readers where and when and to whom I made objection to the constitutionality of the Queens County motion.

I frankly confess guilt to doubting the wisdom of holding a National Party Convention this year, but at no time and no place and to no one have I said that the Queens County motion was not submitted in strict accord with the provisions of the National Constitution.

I question the wisdom of a National Convention for several reasons. First on account of the expense involved. We are just emerging from the indebtedness that has served as a brake on the party for several years. A convention will cost between \$15,000 and \$20,000 if all the States send delegates. All the states are not in a financial condition to pay the expense of delegates. The Queens County motion makes no provision for financing the convention. In fact, no mention is made of it. A convention cannot finance itself and unless provision is made, there is a grave probability of having representation only from the States more favorably situated financially, leaving the weaker states without delegates. The amount necessary to pay the expenses of a convention cannot be raised over night. It requires time and persistent effort. But that objection would not be sufficient were it not that we are to have a National Party Convention next April or May for the purpose of nominating presidential candidates and formulating our platform and program for the presidential campaign. You may answer that we can formulate our platform and program this year and nominate our candidates either at this year's convention or by referendum. I hope it will be sufficient to remind the comrades, who raise that contention, of our experience with both the platform and the nomination of the presidential candidate in 1916. The convention enthusiasts insist that the new world conditions demand a new party declaration; that our present declarations and program are out of date. It will require no extended argument to convince persons who think, that we are in a stage of constant transition and that any statement adopted at a convention this year may be entirely out of date for our presidential campaign, so that we cannot argue that a convention this year will be all-sufficient.

In addition, the party must carry on a nation-wide campaign for the release of war-time prisoners. This cannot be done on good intentions. Even our good comrades of *The Revolutionary Age* are not publishing their paper and traveling about on good will. As well meaning as they are, they have found it necessary to make charges to cover at least their railroad fare and living expenses and, in most cases, a per diem.

The spirit of *The Revolutionary Age* is clearly revealed in the appeal to the members to protest against the explanation respecting the Boston resolution. You are not satisfied with the National Office accepting the National Constitution as a guide for the Socialist Party.

The members must be aroused to a protest, right or wrong. This is not the first time I have known people to subscribe to the doctrine, "United we stand, but divided we stand it better." And I am not sailing into the field of speculation when I say that it is the deliberate purpose to foist that doctrine on the Socialist Party.

In all that I have read in *The Revolutionary Age* and in most of the resolutions and communications sent to this office in favor of a convention, I have seen nothing to indicate that it is intended as a gathering to work out ways and means of combining the masses in a coherent movement to hasten the day of the social revolution. One of the champions of the convention idea put it very bluntly the other day when he said, "We want to see who is boss in the party." I am not in the least drawing on my imagination when I say that he is not alone in harboring that thought. Others have expressed it more tactfully.

It is up to the members to decide whether or not a convention shall be held. If they decide in the affirmative, like a good soldier, I yield to their desire and will leave nothing undone to help make it a success.

March 28, 1919