

# An Answer to Germer's Criticism

By Louis C. Fraina

IT IS easy to assume attitudes, particularly the attitude of righteous indignation. It is easy to resort to slander and vituperation. These are familiar weapons of the man who has no case, of the man who is in the desperation of despair.

This is precisely what Comrade Germer does. His criticism of *The Revolutionary Age* is not a criticism, it is a violent assault; but it is the assault of a desperate weakened enemy, depending wholly upon poison gas. But the artillery and machine guns of our facts are more than a match for poison gas attacks.

Comrade Germer fights shy of the essentials of the arguments that *The Revolutionary Age* has been making against him and the National Executive Committee for five months. Let us re-consider these arguments.

On November 26, 1918, two weeks after the German Revolution, Local Boston adopted a resolution for an Emergency National Convention, declaring:

The revolutionary crisis in Europe, the campaign of the imperialistic press for armed intervention in Russia, and for armed intervention in Germany and Austria should Socialism conquer, projects a crisis in the movement of the American proletariat.

The international situation is a call to action—the final struggle is coming between Socialism and Capitalism.

In this great crisis, it is imperative that the Socialist Party prepare itself, that it unify itself, that it formulate a policy expressing the requirements of the crisis and the mature judgement of the membership.

That resolution was a clear expression of party necessity and party action. That was five months ago. What did the National Executive Committee do, during these five months of crisis, of the agonized call of the European proletariat to international Socialism, of the collapse of Capitalism and the proletarian revolution in action? Let us re-capitulate (and I shall simply re-state the arguments that *The Revolutionary Age* has been making for five months):

1.—During the greatest crisis in all history, the N. E. C. was dumb and inert. It did not issue any flaming call to the party for action. It dodged all vital issues. It decapitated the party. It clung to petty bourgeois "Socialism"—an infamous betrayal of trust.

2.—Local after local of the Party insisted upon action, but the N. E. C. either ignored or sabotaged their appeals.

3.—New ideas, new concepts of action, a new life, developed in the Party; but the N. E. C. was as stolid as an iceberg, one member at least stigmatizing the insurgent elements as "anarchistic."

4.—Immediately after the armistice and the German Revolution the N. E. C. should have met; but it did not meet until the end of January—almost three months wasted, three months during which a day was equivalent to years of other periods. Tragic waste and incompetency!

5.—When the N. E. C. did finally meet, it was as an Old Man of the Sea. It was reactionary. It refused to call an emergency Party Convention, in spite of the call of the party membership. It issued no flaming declaration on the world crisis. It was dead, inert, conservative, bureaucratic, on the great issues of a world in revolt.

6.—The N. E. C. decided to send delegates (in implication, affiliation) to the Congress of the Great Betrayal at Berne, the Congress of pro-war Socialists, social-patriots and counter-revolutionary "Socialism."

7.—The N. E. C. refused to call a Party National Convention, but it did issue a call for an "Amnesty" Convention together with bourgeois "liberal" and non-Socialist organizations,—a clear abandonment of the class struggle. (Germer says it would cost money to hold a Party Convention, and the Party is "broke;" but wouldn't it cost money to hold an "Amnesty" Convention? A Party Convention could, moreover, in considering the international crisis, equally and necessarily consider our class war prisoners.)

This is our indictment of the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party. This is the story of its treason to international proletarian solidarity and Socialism,—or, in charity, shall we say "incompetency"?

Comrade Germer's whole letter reeks with declarations and insinuations that we are liars. Yet upon what does he base these serious accusations? Upon one thing: "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 *The Revolutionary Age* said was this, in its article of March 8:

We have been informed that Comrade Germer has now made an objection to the Local Queens County motion on the ground that it was initiated by a delegate body.

But this statement was preceded by a passage which clearly indicates that we didn't depend upon that "information." This is the passage:

The resolution offered by Local Queens has, however, now received the requisite number of seconds and must be put to a referendum of the membership. But, over the advocate of strict parliamentary procedure and constitutional law, except in such minor matters as the election of delegates to an International Conference or the decision to align our party with a gang of international assassins, Comrade Germer rules that the motion will first have to be published in the official *Bulletin*, thereby causing a delay of 15 days or more. In other words, everything is to be done to aid the holding of an Amnesty Convention, which apparently nobody, outside of a few officials, desire, while everything is to be done to delay the referendum for a National Emergency Convention which is backed by the requisite number of Party branches and locals.

In this it is clear that we knew the Queens County motion was going to referendum. The passage that came further on was simply supplementary. It was an error. But an error is not a lie. Why did not Comrade Germer simply write us that we had been misinformed about his alleged objection? No! His job is to call comrades liars and to cuttle-fish in the momentous issues now agitating the party. And that is all Comrade Germer offers to prove us liars! ...

In its attitude, *The Revolutionary Age* has discussed

party issues as matters of principles. It has not resorted to defamation of character—as Comrade Germer does. We have a strong case; Germer and his crowd of moderates have not: hence their peculiar tactics.

Our charge against Comrade Germer is that of using obstructionist tactics, not that he refused to initiate a referendum which wasn't framed properly. When he received the Local Boston motion for a referendum on a Party Convention, he knew that it was not properly framed: why did he not immediately notify the Boston Comrades? Instead, he sends it out for seconds (knowing its form was unconstitutional), thereby wasting time and sabotaging the Emergency Convention. A Party official should facilitate the processes of the membership, not obstruct them.

Comrade Germer grandiloquently declaims that the Party Constitution is the will of the membership. Of course. But why, then, does Comrade Germer and the N. E. C. violate it? It was unconstitutional for the N. E. C. to "elect" delegates to the Berne Congress. Germer quotes the Constitution: "The duties and powers of the National Executive Committee shall be: (a) to represent the Party in all National and International affairs." Precisely; but where the Constitution does not otherwise provide. And the Party Constitution distinctly provides that *International Delegates shall be chosen only by referendum vote of the membership*. The N. E. C., accordingly, deliberately violated the party's "fundamental law."

Why? Comrade Germer says there "was no time to elect by referendum vote." The N. E. C. was in a hurry to participate in Berne, but not in a hurry about giving the membership an opportunity to express itself through an Emergency Convention. Why did not the N. E. C. suggest a referendum in November, knowing that an International Congress would be held?

Facts are facts. And the facts are that the "Amnesty" Convention has been used (unsuccessfully) to sabotage the Emergency Convention.

It is disgraceful for Germer to insinuate that we are not interested in our class war prisoners. But we want action, not petty bourgeois hot-air. *The Revolutionary Age* is consistently carrying on a propaganda for our class war prisoners, for industrial mass action to liberate them, on the basis of the proletarian class struggle.

It is the N. E. C. that is delaying the liberation of our imprisoned comrades. If they had done their duty, we could have had a Party Convention in January or February, unified our forces and initiated a national Socialist campaign for the liberation of our class prisoners. ...

But enough! Comrade Germer's "arguments" are not the real arguments against *The Revolutionary Age* and the Left Wing. No, comrades of the Socialist Party; the issue is one between moderate Socialism and revolutionary Socialism. The N. E. C. majority emphatically expresses that moderate Socialism which in Europe is counter-revolutionary. That is the issue! We are frank, Comrade Germer: our purpose is to conquer the Party for revolutionary Socialism.

## Soviet Problems — an Interview with Lenin

Granted to M. Puntevold, of Norway

THE main duty of the Russian people during the period of political and social transition is to establish a proletarian dictatorship in city and country, all with a view of tumbling to the ground the regime of the bourgeoisie, to prevent one individual from making use of another and to establish Socialism under which there will be no division into classes.

"Intervention becomes a more difficult problem for the Allies every day, it would also be very much hampered by growing sympathy for the Soviet Government in Entente countries. At the same time, the Russian Red Army is growing in strength every day.

It is, of course, not entirely impossible that the Entente will attempt to intervene this spring, but this is very unlikely.

On the agrarian question we are divided into three groups. The half-farmers, or country proletariat, who now, as before, sell their labor and who are our best supporters; the small farmers and the big farmers. The last mentioned are, of course, opposed to us, as we have taken their lands away from them. But their resistance is broken.

The small farmers, contrary to the more wealthy class, are wabbling. They are, of course, against grain monopoly and desire free trade for their stocks. There is a great lack of materials in the country and of food in the cities. Our economical situation is also very uncertain. Not the least serious factor is the shortage of fuel. As we have just conquered the coal district,

there is hope of betterment in the immediate future. Had it not been for this the situation would have been untenable.

We believe that the so-called freedom of the press means only the right of the bourgeoisie to fool the people and lie to them. The bourgeoisie own the entire capital of the newspapers, the printing materials and machinery and the newspapers themselves. With the press in their hands they hold unlimited power over public opinion. The freedom of the press is the same as freedom of capital. And we are subduing the capitalists.

The press only for the proletariat—nothing for capital. That is our slogan. When the war on the bourgeoisie is ended, if a political party wishes a newspaper for its use we may put at their disposal a printing shop as well as paper, but we are now in the midst of a civil war. There is no question about that. To establish a free press at present would be the same thing as to announce that the war is ended before it really is.

We have already legalized the Menshevik Party, which has its official paper, *Always Forward*, published in Moscow. In the nearest future, I believe, we will be able to legalize the Social Revolutionary Party. The opposition press will also soon be unmuzzled, all in the degree to which the different parties are willing to work loyally and willingly with us.

Civil war is civil war. It writes its own laws. It is like this: Either the proletariat governs or capital rules. There is no other alternative. There are some who are not pleased with our dictatorship. I say to them, "Go to Siberia and see if the dictatorship is better there. We will willingly place transportation at your disposal."

The idea of annihilating Capitalism without civil war is Utopian. You undoubtedly know that the number of millionaires in Norway has been multiplied by ten during the war. Do you believe that the Norwegian millionaires, just because of arguments, will capitulate without the blow of a sword?

Or maybe you can tell me why ten to twelve million people were killed in the world war? "War until victory" was written on Kerensky's banners. "War until victory over the bourgeoisie" is the workers' revision of this slogan. And there you have it all.

Arming the proletariat—this we must teach, and the disarming of the bourgeoisie. Give up the disarmament program, advised Zeth Hoglund, a Swedish Socialist, in 1910. His opinion was different from mine. Now he certainly must agree with me.

In my message to the National Commune on March 10, I said that as the time passes and the majority becomes assured of its power, then we can raise the question of general suffrage before the Soviet. We must keep the dictatorship in order to be able to control the bourgeoisie.