

Correspondence

To The Revolutionary Age:—

I RECEIVED a letter from a comrade who expresses great concern, lest the mention of the possibility of a new party may work mischief with the Left Wing conquest of the party. This comrade stands today in the foremost ranks of the Socialist movement in the United States and undoubtedly expresses the sentiments of many thousands of the most earnest members of the party. For this reason I am asking you to publish this letter as my personal expression on the vital question involved. I may add, however, that I did not send this letter without asking several of the members of the National Left Wing Council to read it, and I am assured that my letter expresses the point of view which dominated the National Left Wing Conference.

The letter follows (July 9, 1919):

I have just read your letter of July 4th to Comrade Cohen. I hasten to make answer in addition to such answer as may be made by Comrade Cohen, in the first place to greet you from this office and to urge you to send me all the suggestions you have for immediate action, and in the second place to make somewhat clearer to you the party situation as it stands after the Left Wing Conference. I think I would have written just what you wrote if I had not been to the Conference, using almost the same language, as I recall my point of view of twenty days ago. On the other hand, I am quite positive that if you had undergone the experience of the Left Wing Conference there are certain statements you make which you would consider inappropriate to the actual situation.

It is very important that we understand one another fully and exactly under the circumstances of this party crisis. . . . By this time you have received the delayed number of *The Revolutionary Age* telling about the Conference. . . . But I will deal with the single item of "new party" just as it came to my personal attention and just as I reacted to the whole idea.

From the opening of the Conference it became evident that there was some sort of a move on foot to start a new Communist Party right then and there. I did not know who was behind this move. The whole idea seemed preposterous to me, not that I was averse to the idea of a new party, if that was the best way for us, but that I could not see how a Conference called as this one was called could presume to make this sort of a decision for the fifty or sixty thousand members definitely within the Left Wing.

On the sensible basis that we had better see first what we agreed about and what we disagreed about, the majority waived aside discussion of a new party several times. Finally, it became evident that we had to discuss this question or nothing. An entire session was taken up directly on this subject, with unlimited discussion, most of the delegates taking the floor. The vote was against the immediate formation of a new party.

Meanwhile the forces for the new party plan made themselves known. First, a small group from New York and Philadelphia, with Comrade Zucker as indefatigable spokesman. Second, the four Michigan delegates, with Comrade O'Brien and another comrade from Rochester, and with Miss Gordon of the Left Wing of Minnesota. Third, the Federation delegates, with only a few exceptions. The poll was 38 votes for and 55 against.

Next came the Michigan proposal. The

Concerning a New Party

Michigan Convention had decided upon a call for a new party to be formed September first, and this call was made absolute. The Left Wing could take or leave it; Michigan would go ahead anyhow.

By this time I had become convinced of one thing: that there must be an exact date when this party fuss shall stop, and this date could not be left to the choosing of the old N. E. C. There is no use quoting the Constitution as against the proposition that *the old N. E. C. will control so long as there is no Convention*. And there is no use driving a good argument to the point of absurdity by insisting that there is no way for the old N. E. C. to frame up a Right Wing Convention for August 30th or later. Things can be done in the physical sense which are ethically outrageous. They have been done; they are being done from day to day by Germer and his bosses. The gang that has gone as far as these men have gone will hardly stop at any extremity. The point is that by forcing them to these extremities we make clearer than ever the real state of affairs within the party, showing beyond dispute that the Left Wing is the party. This it is mighty important to do. But it is another matter to keep on insisting against everything and anything that the Left Wing is bound to control a party convention chosen by a few thousand voters still outside the Left Wing movement. And even worse would it be to let the mass of the membership remain adrift at the pleasure of the gangsters, telling them that some day it will all come out all right.

The Michigan proposal had the advantage of coming from the outside, from an ousted State, as a mandate of the Michigan membership, expressed by a Convention. It had the disadvantage of being pinned on to a declaration of principles upon which the new party was to be organized. Also, it did not include the alternative of Left Wing control of the August 30th Convention. It was amended to meet the latter objection and it was made clear that the program attached to the Michigan call was of a tentative character. But I think the majority was fully justified in repudiating the State "patriotism" of my very good friends and comrades from Michigan.

The action of the Conference itself was not different in principles. Comrade Wagefleknicht reported for the Organization Committee in favor of: 1) a thorough campaign to control the August 30th Convention for the Left Wing; and 2) the alternative, failing the fulfillment of certain conditions, of organizing a new party September 1st in Convention of Left Wing delegates. Afterwards the further alternative was added; 3) an August 30th Convention to organize a new party if the old N. E. C. does away with the Emergency Convention. The conditions for the August 30th regular party Convention are the seating of Left Wing delegates, the undoing of expulsions and suspension, the fulfillment of referendums.

By this time the minority had rallied around the Michigan plan, though the Federation delegates made it obvious that they were uneasy about the Michigan theorizing. As result, 31 delegates withdrew from active participation in the Conference. Now they have joined in the call for a September 1st Communist Party Convention, but on the basis of *the Left Wing Program*.

Comrade, we must talk new party. This

thing has moved faster that you and I reckoned. Those ousted from the party made a response which you and I, still within the party, did not feel. Arguments were made about the party fight which had the merit at least of discounting the idea of too long a fight for its physical apparatus, though these arguments have yet failed to budge me as to the worth whileness of our two months campaign within the party. The subsequent expulsion of Massachusetts, the threatened expulsion of Pennsylvania (and probably of Ohio)—all of these show at the same time the lengths to which the old bunch will go and the clearness of the Left Wing triumph. When we come together August 30th in Chicago, there will be no question but that the party is ready for Communism, or that the new party is only the same party turning into a new avenue of aggressive attack against American and world Capitalism.

Not to mention "new party" in connection with our fight within the party is to play the old game of fooling our own people in the vain hope of allaying the timid ones. We cannot yield ourselves to the Michigan-Federation politicianneering, nor can we ignore the realities of party sentiment which this call for a Communist Party represents. Those who will not frankly face a crucial situation, recognize its definite alternatives, and accept the dictation of facts, cannot be truly helpful in this situation. There must be a showdown, and it had better be August 30th, let the old gang do as they will. I have argued that "new party" is just what they played for, and I refused to help them get what they wanted. But I cannot see the merit of carrying this argument to the extreme of forgetting that we have something far more important to do than to attenuate a party factional fight beyond the time needed to show up the situation clearly to the active membership. I do not know just what we shall be called upon to do with regard to the physical apparatus of the party, but I mainly would think it petty folly to let such a consideration make us forget the big world fight in which we are engaged. Part of this fight is to be made within the Socialist Party; the higher part of it is a tremendous work of agitation among the 30,000,000 wage workers of the United States.

If this letter still leaves you in doubt as to the sound sense of the Conference decision to compel a showdown on August 30, after making the fight to control the Emergency Convention, I want the chance to write to you again. As to talking and writing "new party" I must certainly disagree with you. What you and I can discuss every member can consider. It is all-important that the membership understand clearly the situation as it will be on August 30th, and all of its possible alternatives.

In re-reading what I have already written, it occurs to me to add the New York delegation was against the new party proposition and in favor of working for the election of Left Wing delegates to the regular party convention, and that the minority New York delegates acted against instructions. It is probable that the Federations will not help us in this campaign so far as some of their Central Executive Committees are concerned, but we must do our best against this internal opposition. If the old gang decides to call off the Emergency Convention, the membership will accept this as the final proof of their defeat, and will be ready to deal with the Left Wing Convention as the real party convention.

I. E. FERGUSON