

Correspondence

Letter from Oakley C. Johnson, Secretary-Treasurer, Socialist Party of Michigan to National Secretary, Left Wing Section.

YOURS of the 10th instant, suggesting that Michigan Socialists purchase dues stamps from the National Left Wing Organization, thus affiliating with said organization, at hand.

It will be impossible to comply with your request regarding the purchase of Left Wing stamps. Michigan is issuing its own special and propaganda stamps, and, in conjunction with the Russian and other foreign language federations, and with various locals throughout the country, is working for the formation of a *Real Socialist Party*, not the capture of an imitation one.

I know you regret that the Socialist Party should split up, and especially that the revolutionary section should split into factions, but this process, historically considered, seems inevitable. It has taken place in the countries of Europe, notably in Russia, where the Social Revolutionists split into Maximalists and Minimalists, and the Social Democrats into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, making four Socialist parties. The same thing is happening here. No one desires harmony more than we do, but you cannot harmonize inharmonious principles and elements. The only group that can function in a social crisis in a revolutionary way is one that is united on principles; any success that you may have in uniting the diverse and heterogeneous elements that now compose the majority of the Left Wing will be barren as far as permanent and useful results are concerned. Hence the stand taken by the Michigan comrades on the Left Wing proposition.

OAKLEY C. JOHNSON,
State Secretary-Treasurer.

Answer of I. E. Ferguson to O. C. Johnson.

I do not understand why you write that you know I regret that the Socialist Party should split up. I have been quite insistent that the Socialist Party now rightfully belongs to the Left Wing and that the Left Wing rank and file should take the party and do with it as they will. It will be impossible for the non-revolutionary reformists to remain in a party controlled by the Left Wing. I am in absolute agreement with the Hillquit formula that the time has come for the party to divide into its two antagonistic camps. But I do not see why a defeated minority, with virtually no membership supporting the hold-over officialdom, should be generously tendered the Socialist Party and its tens of thousands of members who have not yet come into alignment on the Right and Left sides. That I would regret, but I would not press this point beyond the time fairly to be allowed for a final campaign within the party to bring definitely into the Left Wing the mass of the membership which belongs there. I am still conscious of certain advantages in developing the Left Wing inner campaign to the point of taking hold of the Socialist Party organization, or pushing the Right Wing to such extremes in holding on to the party machinery that there is a clear case of the Left Wing as the true continuity of the party.

Some highly estimable comrades have given of their unstinted efforts these eighteen years to build up the Socialist Party organization. The essence of that organization is the solid phalanx of membership which is identified with the militant proletarian movement of the United States and the world. It is not the

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habit of my mind to think flippantly of this organized membership. You characterize the present party as an "imitation one." I am inclined, on the contrary, to analyze far more closely the reality of our party situation.

There are "leaders" in the party, and "theoreticians," who are imitation Socialists. There are hundreds and thousands within the mass of the party who are imitation Socialists. Yet today it is not so indifferent a circumstance to belong to the Socialist Party. There was the trying period of the war, and much of the chaff went with the hurricane. Now there is the tension of a world in revolution, and anyone who has spoken this past year to audiences of Socialists knows the hope and pride of revolution which glows in their hearts.

Of course I know that as viewed from the high walls of the Proletarian University of America this mass responsiveness to the impulses of revolution in process means nothing. It is simply "emotional" frothiness. It does not emanate from the Proletarian University class room, how then can be of revolutionary significance?

I have had many occasions to quote Marx and Lassalle to the effect that being a Socialist means, in essence, understanding the scientific rudiments of Socialism. I have also often taken occasion to speak my sincere admiration for the "study class" work which has been carried on from Detroit. It is hardly necessary for me to emphasize my high estimate of economic, social and historical learning as a factor in the building of a Socialist movement.

But I do not confuse the high importance of schooling Socialists with my conceptions of a mass proletarian momentum toward revolution. The learning must take its effect through the mass movement, and therefore there must be a merger of the two: that is, Socialist learning must permeate through the revolutionary masses. But the mass movement has its tremendous meaning and importance quite aside from the matter of Socialist schooling.

And this is where you are now making your very serious mistake. I will not accuse my friends and comrades of Michigan of rank insincerity, but I am absolutely convinced that unless you move quickly to align yourselves with the general Left Wing movement, you will not only destroy your own usefulness to the proletarian advance in America but wilfully foster a state of confusion which may do great harm. Because you have lost sight entirely of the mass movement of the American proletariat as represented within the American Socialist Party. You have become so engrossed with the nicety of phrases that you have overlooked the intense realities of life.

Consider, comrade, you do not hesitate to align yourself with ten thousand or twenty thousand members of the Russian-speaking Federations? Why are these less affected by the "imitation" character of the Socialist Party than the same number of our Scandinavian, Italian and Jewish comrades? Or our German comrades? Or even the Americans?

And why this attitude of holier-than-thou as to principles, when you have cheaply flung away all principle and swallowed entire the program of this Left Wing which you spurn?

You want a plaything all of your own—a Michigan Socialist Party of America. You want to make it and you want to control it. You piled criticism upon criticism against the

work of the National Left Wing Conference and then brazenly turn around and scrap your special Michigan "principles" in favor of our program in its entirety. No wonder you want a nice little party with the Left Wing out as well as the Right Wing, because only as the sole English-speaking group in the new Communist Party would you have the least chance to foist upon it the Michigan idiosyncracies. You cannot be heard to condemn us by a phrase of contempt and at the same time to appropriate our program. A national movement will quickly put you in your place.

How glibly you quote the history of the break-up of the Russian parties, as if this were a case in point. As between the Socialist Revolutionaries and Social-Democrats we have the distinct representation of different social groups, and as between the two divisions of these two parties we have the fundamental cleavage between reformists and revolutionaries everywhere. When you talk of four, or three, Socialist parties in the United States, *historically* developed, it is up to you to show a fundamental social or tactical basis which clearly differentiates the different parties, otherwise you must admit that one or more of those parties exists as an historical record of intrigue—and is otherwise without historical explanation.

You say "we cannot harmonize inharmonious principles and elements." I agree. We do not want to replace an old fake harmony with a new fake harmony. We want a party of like-minded comrades, all of revolutionary consciousness.

We will never follow the Michigan example of throwing all principle aside in order to catch an advantage out of an enthusiasm of certain elements for the empty flourish of immediate establishment of a Communist Party.

After all, comrade, there is no Communist Party until there is some sort of group integrated by fundamental agreement in principle. Between Michigan—and in this I do not admit for one moment that you really represent the rank and file of the Michigan membership—and the Federationists, who accept their mandate from two or three Executive Committees, not from their membership, there is no bond of fundamental principle. Between ourselves and the Federation membership there has been such a bond for three-quarters of a year, and in tendency for a much longer time.

In regard to the Socialist Party and the Left Wing alike you miss the crucial point that there is a membership, needing sharper consciousness and fuller understanding, which is of revolutionary impulse. We are going to hold ourselves as the servants of this membership. You are going to lay down the law to them from the secluded heights, quoting them the appropriate texts. We are going to live and fight with them, today and tomorrow and until we die, trying to shape their instincts of revolt toward the goal of an American Communist Commonwealth.

At the Left Wing Conference and since, I worried much about this factional division within the Left Wing, and I am yet eager to be done with it. But the Left Wing has nothing to concede in principle. The suggestion has been made that we can make more clear the mandate of the Left Wing Conference for a party of Communism on August 30th, either by control of the Emergency Convention or

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