

Correspondence

DEAR Comrade Stoklitsky:

It is rather curious that you and I should find ourselves engaged for the moment in party controversy as opponents, after we have stood firmly shoulder to shoulder since November 7, 1918, the day when the *Communist Propaganda League of Chicago* came into existence by your initiative. I believe, however, that our opposition is more apparent than real, and I write this letter not to meet what might be regarded as a personal attack against myself and associates, but with the idea of helping to clear up the situation.

When I came back to Chicago from the Left Wing National Conference I found the few comrades with whom I had a chance to speak astounded at the idea that anyone wanted to start a new party out of the Left Wing Conference itself. I had to leave the city before your Federation group acted upon the reports of the delegates, but I have no doubt whatever that any group, fully advised of the situation at New York, would agree with the majority. You have transposed the question of *Communist Party on September 1* to the question of *Communist Party on June 21*, and give the impression, by your argument, that the majority of the Conference was opposed to taking a stand for a Communist Party. You know as a matter of absolute fact that it was only by refusal of the Federation delegates to vote on the Michigan proposition for a September 1 Convention that this was defeated.

This does not deny the fact that there were on June 21 a considerable portion of the Socialist Party membership ready for the idea of a new party, but it is equally true that this was almost exclusively the groups of expelled and suspended members. The Conference acted primarily on the basis of those who are yet members of the Socialist Party in good standing. In fact, the division within the Conference shows clearly that it was the delegates who were still members of the party who opposed the immediate formation of a new party. They wanted to conduct the Left Wing campaign within the party to a point of complete withdrawal of the revolutionary elements by September 1, realizing that in most of the States the Left Wing adherents were looking to the regular party elections as the means of making their final onslaught against the Moderates of the Socialist Party.

At New York neither you nor anyone else saw any crucial point involved in waiting two months in order to help bring into the new party the Socialist Party membership, of equally sound calibre with the suspended and expelled groups, who were sure to look to the Emergency Convention as their means of expressing a stand for revolutionary socialism.

Now you classify all of the majority group as "Centrist" and "swamp," implying that the Michiganites and Federationists are the only aggressive elements in the movement. You already know my high regard for the Federation membership. I believe they are of the same courage and intense devotion to the revolutionary cause as their brothers and sisters in Russia and Hungary. It is out of such ardor and courage that revolution is born.

You know, however, that the work of Socialist education among these comrades has just begun. The idea of men like Comrade Hourwich and yourself blathering about these comrades as the "only consistent Bolsheviks" is an extreme of absurdity and demagogism. Yet I have no doubt at all but that the Fed-

An Open Letter in reply to Alexander Stoklitsky in "The Communist."

eration membership gives us an excellent basis for carrying on a big work of revolutionary socialist education. Because the English-speaking membership, for the most part, is not regimented by agencies of centralized expression, and because out of many individual reactions to the present party breakup there is bound to come much diversity of opinion as to just how to proceed, does not at all prove that this membership is of poorer calibre than the Federation membership.

By this I do not mean to make an objection to your centralized Federation control, only I call your attention to the fact that the members of the party not accustomed to accept the program of a central committee are apt to show more wavering and hesitation without in any sense being less revolutionary or aggressive than the Federation membership. I think that we must all learn the lesson of centralized control and action, providing this centralization is itself made responsive to the mass will. My objection is your misuse of the name "Centrist" as a convenient term of abuse for anyone who disagreed with you in New York on a program which you yourself never heard of until you arrived here for the Conference. When you can bring yourself to attack comrades like Lloyd and Fraina in this silly, reckless manner, you display a passion which is worthier of a better cause. You only make yourself ridiculous when you characterize your own trusted associates as unworthy simply because they differ with you as to generalship with regard to a two months' campaign—and nothing else.

Did the time for a Communist Party arrive by a miracle? No, the time is here because of organization and propaganda work. I know no individual who has contributed more to the organization work leading to a Communist Party than yourself. On the other hand, Comrades Lloyd and Fraina have done inestimable service as propagandists for revolutionary socialism, and it is only upon the foundation of this propaganda that we can now proceed with the Communist Party. That is why I cannot take lightly your methods of reckless attacks against individuals, at a time of party flux and excitement when you can demolish individuals overnight by calling them names. This shows demagogism as a substitute for principle, and it is unworthy of one who has done the valuable constructive work which must be credited to you.

Personally I do not care what attacks are made against me, either by the politicians of the Right Wing or of the Left Wing. I have long been immune to sensitiveness on the point of personal attacks. I realize, too, that it is sometimes necessary to discuss individuals as a means of getting at a question of policy, and those who participate in party work should be prepared to accept condemnation of the most extreme kind for their errors—and anything done will be wrong in the eyes of some group or other. But your general condemnation of the Left Wing is hardly excused by enthusiasm for the Communist Party. You had better blend this passionate enthusiasm with a little judgment if you expect to make it possible for others to work with you without absolutely accepting your judgment as infallible at every moment on every point.

I have been laboring here in New York for one purpose: to bring all the Left Wing elements together, in spite of the split in the Conference, on the program of a Communist Party on September 1. At this moment it appears that this goal is attained, and the majority and minority of the Conference will be rejoined by co-operation of the National Council and the National Organization Committee. Meanwhile the *Revolutionary Age* has carried on a consistent propaganda for a Communist Party, and everything done by me as National Secretary of the Left Wing has been focused on the organization of the new party. Nor am I at all loath to give the minority full credit for their contribution to the work of promoting the new party. The task is much too big for all of us together, and it will take much effort—and a spirit bigger than the bandying of names—to create in this country a real party of revolutionary socialism.

Yours in Communist Comradeship,
I. E. FERGUSON.

Petrograd in 1919

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to fire on other Russians were given the choice, either that every tenth man should be shot, or that they should give up their ringleaders. The ringleaders, twelve in number, were given up, were made to dig their own graves, and shot. The whole story may well be Archangel gossip. If so, as a specimen of such gossip, it is not without significance. In another part of the carriage an argument on the true nature of selfishness caused some heat because the disputants insisted on drawing their illustrations from each other's conduct. Then there was the diversion of a swearing match at a wayside station between the conductor and some one who tried to get into this carriage and should have got into another. Both were fluent and imaginative swearers, and even the man from Archangel stopped talking to listen to them. One, I remember, prayed vehemently that the other's hand might fly off, and the other, not to be outdone, reorted with a similar prayer with regard to the former's head. In England the dispute, which became fierce indeed, would have ended in assault, but here it ended in nothing but the collection on the platform of a small crowd of experts in bad language who applauded verbal hits with impartiality and enthusiasm.

At last I tried to sleep, but the atmosphere in the carriage, of smoke, babies, stale clothes, and the peculiar smell of the Russian peasantry which no one who has known it can forget, made sleep impossible.

Left Wing Pic-Nic Sunday, August 24th, 1919

at EASTERN BOULEVARD PARK
formerly Hoffman's Park
Eastern Boulevard and Fort Schuyler Road,
WESTCHESTER, N. Y.

Oriental Dances by Miss Katayama
Vladimir Resnikoff, Russian Singer
and many other attractions.

A RED PICNIC — A GREAT TIME
FOR A RED CAUSE

Picnic starts at 10 A. M.

arranged by the

LEFT WING SECTION SOCIALIST
PARTY OF THE BRONX.

Tickets in advance 30c At the gate 35c.
Directions: From E. 149th St. take West-
chester Av. car and change for Fort Schuyler,
get off at the Park.