
BoI Agent Account of a Mass Meeting of the Left Wing Section of the Socialist Party: Minneapolis, MN — April 13, 1919.

by Frank O. Pelto

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Report Made By: Frank O. Pelto.

Place Where Made: Minneapolis.

Date When Made: Apr. 14, 1919.

Period for Which Made: Apr. 13, 1919.

Title of Case and Offense Charged or Matter Under Investigation:

In re: Investigation of Bolshevism

*Statement of Operations, Evidence Collected, Names and Addresses
of Persons Interviewed, Places Visited, Etc.:*

At Minneapolis.

Employee attended a mass meeting of the so-called "Left Wing" of the Socialist Party at Commonwealth Hall, 1217 Hennepin Avenue, called for the purpose of discussing matters concerning the Left Wing, or radical element, which threatens to bolt from the party. The meeting was called to order about 3 o'clock and a prolonged discussion was had first as to whether to exclude all non-members, of which there were about 6 or 7 present, including Employee. It was finally decided that the non-members be allowed to be present at the meeting and to take part in the discussions, but not have a vote in matters put to vote.

The first matter taken up for consideration was the May Day celebration or observation by the workers. Comrade [Charles] Dirba made a motion to the effect that in as much as a hall cannot be secured in Minneapolis large enough to accommodate the crowd of workers, it was suggested that several meetings be had in various parts of the city; that one of the main meetings be held at 1217 Hennepin Avenue and an-

other meeting be held at 4th Street and Nicollet and that a committee of 5 be appointed to have charge of arranging the meetings and if possible a demonstration, a parade, or something of that sort.

Dirba's motion carried and the following members were nominated to be voted upon for the committee: Matson, Scott, Sugarman, Buck, DeGroot, Dirba, Tiala, Larson, and Mueller. After a vote was taken by ballot, the following were elected as members of the committee to arrange for the various meetings on May Day and if possible a demonstration: Matson, Scott, Tiala, Larson, and Dirba.

This committee is to have full power to make such arrangements for the May Day observance by the workers as they see fit and to cooperate with the different locals which have appointed already for that purpose so as to make this celebration an international affair. It was suggested by a member at the meeting that the committee request all comrades who have seen service in the United States Army to march in uniform at the head of the parade, if a parade is to be had, so that police officers will not dare to pull down the flag from these men as they did on a former occasion when an attempt was made by the Socialists to hold a public meeting against the war. This was considered a brilliant idea and the committee was instructed to send word to all veteran comrades to that effect.

The next matter taken up for consideration was the so-called "Left Wing" manifesto or resolution, one of the purposes for which the meeting was called. Comrade Dirba was asked to open the discussion. Dirba is a secretary of the Slavic locals of the city with headquarters at 1217 Hennepin Avenue, and is very active at all meetings selling radical newspapers and

books; at this meeting Dirba sold *The Revolutionary Age*. Before taking up the discussion, Dirba passed around the following resolution:

**RESOLUTION OF THE LEFT WING
OF THE TWIN CITIES.**

Every day makes [more clear] the need of organizing a clearly defined, compact Left Wing of the Socialist Party of America.

In their call for the meeting of the 1st Congress of the new Revolutionary International, the Communist Party of Russia, the Bolsheviki, have intentionally omitted the SPA as a whole, but have invited the elements of the Left Wing, the tendencies represented by E.V. Debs and the Socialist Propaganda League of America.

The National Executive Committee of the SP, on the other hand, has officially recognized the infamous Berne Conference of Social-Patriots and Reform-Socialists, who are traitors to the working class. The NEC is now sending to Europe one of its "old guard" to confer with the old International Bureau and others on how to resurrect the Second International. It is stooping to every means to prevent the calling of an Emergency National Convention of the Party, for fear that the Convention will repudiate its reactionary policies, or, at least, give expression to and consolidate the Left Wing.

Officially the Socialist Party of America is still committed to the same ideas and policies which wrecked the Second International and have been absolutely disproved and discredited by the war and the shameful surrender of the official Socialist Parties of Germany, France, Belgium, and England; namely, the recognition of nationalism as against internationalism, pure parliamentarism as against direct mass action of the workers, and reforms as against revolution.

In opposition to the official position of the SPA, the Left Wing Group of the Twin Cities proclaims and organizes to uphold the following principles and ideas:

That at this time of the highest development of capitalism, when its contradictions have come to the bursting point, and the Social Revolution is actually going on in Russia and other countries, and is certain to sweep on all over Europe — the one and only aim and purpose of the Socialist Party is and should be the seizure of the powers of state, the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the taking over of the means of production and distribution; in short, the Social Revolution.

That the first step in the Social Revolution, the seizure of the powers of state, is plainly a political act, and that revolutionary political action by the working class is the sole means of attaining it — any action by the working class consciously taken for the purpose of wresting the political power from the hands of the capitalist class, or advancing the working class struggle for it being revolutionary political action. Mere voting is not revolutionary action, because it will never give the power to the working class. Reforms gained by parliamentary action as concessions from the capitalist class are not for the revolution, but against it. Parliamentary action is revolutionary only to the extent that it is used for revolutionary propaganda and for exposing

and obstructing repressive legislation against the working class.

To the Left Wing belong all those Socialist Party members who believe and pledge themselves to work for the following:

In General —

Revolution, nor Reform;
Revolutionary Mass Action, not mere Parliamentarism.
No Compromise in or out of the Party;
Dictatorship of the Proletariat, not Constituent Assemblies or Coalition Government;
International Working Class Solidarity and Struggle Against the Capitalist Class at All Times, not limited by any nationalistic considerations;

In Particular —

Uniform Declaration of Principles in All Party Platforms, both Local and National, and the Abolition of all Social Reform Planks now contained in them;
Party Ownership and Control of the Official Party Press, and Officially Recognized Educational Institutions;
Immediate Calling of an Emergency National Convention of the Party;
Repudiation of the Berne Conference and the Old International as against the new Revolutionary International being organized by the Communist Parties of Russia and Germany;
Unequivocal Endorsement of the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic, the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviki), the Spartacus Group of Germany, and all other Left Wing Movements of Europe.

After passing the foregoing resolution or Left Wing manifesto prepared for the Left Wing of the Twin Cities, Dirba took the floor and proceeded to explain the difference between the so-called Left Wing Movement and the so-called Reform Socialists, or Parliamentarians, or politicals; (the Left Wing is sometimes called the Reds, or Radicals, and the Reform Socialists are known by the name of Yellows or conservatives). Dirba stated among other things that the political socialists would elect men into the legislature and legislate capitalism out and socialism in; that the Left Wing on the other hand opposes this kind of action, is opposed to all kinds of politics and does not believe that socialism can be brought about by reforms. The Left Wing believes in capturing power by mass action, demonstrations and general strikes; a general strike takes the power by one stroke and not by legislative reforms. Believe in organizing the workers into one big union and go into the factories and run things ourselves; believe in going to the mill owner and saying to him that we workers are going to run this for ourselves and if

you mill owner wish to go to work the same as other workers, well and good, if not, so much the worse for you.

Another speaker took exception to the remarks of the foregoing speaker, accusing him of trying to deliver the Socialist Party into the hands of the IWW; this speaker, whose name I was unable to learn, spoke in a Jewish accent and accused the Left Wing of trying to break up the Socialist Party and that the Left Wing getter get a Right Wing so that it can fly better.

Comrade Larson also spoke of the need of breaking away from the Reform Socialists in order to accomplish something. Mr. Larson is the local distributor of *Truth*, a radical newspaper printed at Duluth and edited by Jack Carney, who is under an indictment in the Federal Court under the Espionage Act, but his case has been continued from time to time. Employee overheard Larson state to another comrade that he distributes nearly 1,000 copies of the *Truth* weekly in the Twin Cities, sold about 300 Saturday [April 12, 1919].

Comrade DeGroot of the 12th Ward Local stated that the Reform Socialists elected in office have worked for war appropriations and other measures pertaining to the war. Stated that [Thomas] Van Lear worked for the Victory-Prayer Proclamation and the war chest a means to exploit the workers after they had begun the war for the benefit of the capitalists.

Another speaker took the floor who put a little dissension in the ranks by stating that the Left Wing Movement was drifting away from the principles upon which Socialism was built; read a passage from Karl

Marx's *Communist Manifesto* to substantiate his argument; speaker believed in both political and industrial action and that they should go hand in hand. While this man was delivering himself of a very heated speech, Comrade Dirba hastened into another room and soon appeared with a book in his hand and asked the floor on a point of information to refute former speaker's argument to the effect that Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, as read by the speaker, means what the speaker interpreted it to mean. Dirba also read from Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* from another page and accused the former speaker of being a Non-Partisan League organizer. The meeting at this stage became very turbulent, a number were on their feet demanding the recognition of the chair. Finally when the chair was able to maintain order, the floor was given to A.L. Sugarman, who state that he had been listening to the speakers without saying a word, but when a 2-by-4 Non-Partisan Leaguer can come into a meeting of this kind and get up and try to make us believe that Karl Marx was a Reform Socialist, it is time for everyone to sit up and take notice. Several took exception to Sugarman's personal remarks. At this point the meeting was adjourned in disorder, it being 6:15 pm.

The consensus of opinion was that the time had come for the Socialist Party to throw off its parliamentary shackles and stand squarely behind the Soviet Republic of Russia and the revolutionary movement of Europe. There were about 75 present all told; a collection was taken up to defray expenses which brought \$8.00.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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