
Facts About New York and About the Nation

by David P. Berenberg

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The New Leader, a weekly paper published by the conservative faction of the Socialist Party in New York, devoted more than two pages of its issue last week to a series of statements on the “damage” allegedly wrought locally and to the whole country by the activities of the “Militants.” The occasion of its attack was the presence in New York of a committee of inquiry and mediation consisting of William Quick of Wisconsin, Arnold Freese of Connecticut, and Roy Burt of Illinois, national organizer of the Socialist Party.

This committee was appointed by the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party to look into the differences that have arisen between the Militants and the Conservatives since the adoption of the Detroit Declaration [June 3, 1934]. At its Buffalo meeting in March 23-24, 1935], the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party, acting on the complaint of the Militants that democratic procedure in the party had been suspended, called on the state and

local organizations in New York to fulfill 9 conditions, set forth in *The Call* for March 30.¹

Given Six Weeks.

The State Committee was ordered by the NEC to dispose of the organizational question in dispute in Local New York, in a democratic manner, within 6 weeks. Eleven weeks have passed and the State Committee has refused to act.

The New York state organization on May 5 [1935] sent an answer to the 9 points which the members of the National Executive Committee did not consider satisfactory. The NEC might then, had it been eager to split the party, as the Conservatives have unceasingly asserted, it wished to do, have with just cause revoked the Local and State charters. To prevent hasty action, and to forestall any possible criticism that it had acted without full knowledge of the local situation, and hoping by mediation to restore harmony, the NEC named the committee referred to above. The committee appeared in New York on Wednesday, June 12 [1935] and began its hearings.

The one thing that the conservatives in power in Local New York and in the New York State Committee fear is an open and disinterested investigation of charges made by the Militants. They therefore refused to appear before the committee. They refused to recognize its existence. They professed to question the legality of its appointment. They called it "handpicked" and asserted that it could not give them a fair hearing. To cover their own unwillingness to face investigation,

¹ These 9 conditions of the NEC to the SEC of New York were: (1) Adherence to rule of NEC making advocates of violence and Communism ineligible for party membership; (2) SEC to issue a statement accepting the 1934 Declaration of Principles; (3) Rigid enforcement of local, state, and national constitutions; (4) SEC to rescind resolution banning locals from accepting qualified members of the YPSL; (5) All party members, committees, and papers banned from making or issuing public statements attacking the integrity of the party, its members, and committees; (6) Local New York and the SEC to "promptly dispose of all questions of membership and organization in dispute in a democratic and constitutional manner"; (7) YPSL to be promptly reinstated on basis that it shall conform to decisions of Local New York, but not be obligated to support "any Socialist paper that engages in recognized factional warfare"; (8) *The New Leader* to restore its former constitution, cease being a factional organ, and to reorganize its Association and Board of Directors to be representative of all tendencies in New York; (9) Failure of any group to comply or reach agreement within 6 weeks, and upon formal charges from any New York branch or local, to result in hearing on said charges by a special meeting of the NEC at the earliest possible date.

they resorted to the time-honored device of assassinating the characters of the investigators. The investigation is called, in the *New Leader* headlines, a "Maneuver of the Left Wing to 'Get New York.'" "Thomas," says the organ of the Right Wing, "Leads Factional Crew."

Hysteria.

These hysterical headlines, and the intemperate tone of the *New Leader* in treating a responsible party committee are in keeping with its intolerant attitude, and with the attitude of the Old Guard throughout the struggle. They will go far to explain to party members not conversant with the details of the conflict, why the New York YPSL found it impossible to continue supporting the *New Leader*. They will help to explain why the Militants found it necessary to appeal to the national organization to get simple justice.

The mediation committee met, in spite of the refusal of the powers that control Local New York to recognize its existence. (The New York State Executive Committee instructed locals and branches "to be on their guard against submitting to investigation.") It heard a detailed statement from Militant Socialists on the destruction of democratic processes in Local New York. It was brought out that some Militant branches which, though small, had been active in Socialist work in their districts, had been disbanded, to reduce Militant representation in the Central Committee. It was shown that at the same time new branches were being organized, often in districts where branches were functioning, further to increase the Conservative strength in the Central Committee.

No Free Discussions.

The party meeting of April 19 [1935] at which Louis Waldman said that "we told the NEC in polite and parliamentary language, "Comrades, you can go to hell," was reviewed in detail, to show that the Conservatives did not permit free discussion of party issues. The persistent refusal of the local officers to recognize the acts of the Detroit Convention, and of the NEC, were cited. The story of the YPSL was told in detail.

Under the circumstances it is not strange that the local officers had no desire to face an investigation. They hid behind such excuses as that they had no time to prepare their case, though this applies

with greater force to the Militants, since it is the Conservatives, and not the Militants, who have access to the party records.

One phase of the attack in the *New Leader* is an article by William M. Feigenbaum under the headline "Left Wing Covers States With Party Wreckage." This unwarranted attack upon whole state organizations, notably upon New Jersey, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, and California, has proved a boomerang. Its intemperate tone and its sweeping charges have called forth resentment where its sponsors had hoped to meet with applause.

The Truth.

The Call will, in the next few weeks, present circumstantial and factual accounts of the Socialist work being done in the various states. In the meantime we wish to point out here that the assertions of widespread ruin are exaggerated. In Ohio, for example, relations between the party and the unions are excellent, particularly in Toledo and Cleveland, in spite of the *New Leader's* assertions to the contrary.

It is patently dishonest to blame the Militants for the weakness of the party in California, where [Upton] Sinclair launched his EPIC movement, and lured away from the party leading Conservatives like Stitt Wilson and John C. Packard and thousands whose grounding in Socialism was weak because of the inadequate educational work done by the Conservatives in their years of absolute control over party machinery.

Build the Party.

The chief dishonesty in the article in question is its complete failure to state that where there has been, in fact, a falling off in Socialist strength in states controlled by the Militants, that has been the result of deliberate sabotage on the part of the Right Wing. The Conservatives preferred rather to destroy the party than see it in hands other than their own. They have become so accustomed to thinking of the Socialist Party as their private possession, that they deny in practice the democracy they preach rather than permit the true majority to take power.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport

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