
“The Willful Group of Seven.”

by David P. Berenberg

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Authorship is assumed to be by the publication's editor, David P. Berenberg.

In a rather clever article written by L.E. Katterfeld and Alfred Wagenknecht for *The Communist* there appears what purports to be an account of the suspension of the seven language federations. This article would do credit to a gathering of medieval Jesuits for the half-truths it contains. The very caption of the article gives the impression that a minority of the committee voted to suspend the federations. The fact is that Seymour Stedman was absent from some meetings when important actions were taken because of business related to our political prisoners. However, he recorded his vote on the suspension of the federations and other matters. His vote made eight, a majority of the whole committee. The Left Wingers also ignore the fact that at previous meetings of the committee we often had only a small number present owing to trials and imprisonment of some members.

The impression is also given that the committee did not give a fair trial. In the case of Michigan, prominent members of that state had boasted repeatedly in Left organs that the state organization had committed the offense for which the state charter was revoked. Wagenknecht and Katterfeld did not even deny that Michigan had adopted the offending clause. Their contention was that probably the Michigan State Secretary [John Keracher] would “interpret” this clause other than the way it was being interpreted in Left Wing organs. When a man confesses guilt time after time it is the best evidence for a jury to act upon. The State Secretary himself did not deny that the offending clause had been adopted by a large vote in a referendum.

In the case of the federations, charges were contained in Secretary Germer's report. He also read translations from the foreign language press, signed state-

ments from the seven Translator-Secretaries, and other material. Comrade Stilson of the Lithuanian Federation was chosen as spokesman to represent the federations. He asked if all the charges were before him. He was answered in the affirmative. He began to plead to the charges. He had the floor frequently. Other Translators were present. They asked questions and prompted Comrade Stilson a number of times. The case was before the committee for two days. At one stage of the proceedings a request was made that all the charges be formulated direct in writing. Shiplacoff and Oneal did so. Stilson again had the floor. Wagenknecht and Katterfeld frequently represented the accused federations before the committee. The record will show that they frequently placed written statements in the record regarding their votes at various stages of the proceedings. Yet the Left Wingers charge in spite of all this that the federations did not have a fair trial.

The statement is made that the charter of Michigan was revoked and the seven federations suspended because the majority of the members of the committee were afraid of the votes of these organizations. This ducks around the real issue before the committee: Did these organizations violate the National Constitution? Our charges specify frequent violations and quote the clauses that were violated. In other words, Katterfeld and Wagenknecht are willing to connive at the repeated violation of the National Constitution in order to capture the Party for the Left Wing. The votes of Michigan and the Federations were relied upon to assist in this conquest. Their pleas about a “fair trial” constitute the poison gas behind which they hoped to effect the capture. The National Committee then held up the election returns so they can be referred to the spe-

cial National Convention. The two Left Wingers [Wagenknecht and Katterfeld] would have been satisfied with this if we had allowed the suspended organizations to send delegates to the convention and permitted them to sit in judgement on their own case! This would be fairness with a vengeance.

The Left Wingers protest because the National Committee placed the Party building beyond the reach of the Left Wing. All over the country they had sabotaged the Party headquarters fund and did everything to smash it. The National Committee was determined that in addition to this smashing it would run no chances of allowing the Party headquarters to fall as booty to a desperate faction. This guarding of the Party's property seems to be the unkindest cut of all, for the paragraph in *The Communist* expressing the disappointment of the Left Wing in not getting it as booty is set in italics.

The National Committee created a holding corporation with a directorate of nine members to receive the party headquarters. Every member of the directorate is a party member of years standing with red cards of the Socialist Party in their possession. What the Left Wing desired was for the Socialist Party to pay for its property and then turn it over to a directorate of men holding white cards of the Left Wing. Why should any real Socialists quarrel over the fact that party property has been placed in the hands of Socialist Party members? It is an administrative function the directorate is entrusted with and is a legal necessity if the Party is to hold property at all.

Katterfeld and Wagenknecht state that "like a tidal wave demand for the tactics and principles of the kind of Socialism" which the Left Wing stands for has swept the Party. This "wave" has worked something like the following:

Let us say that out of a Local of 1,000 members a few become possessed with the obscurantist phrases of the Left Wing. They start a constant and never-ending quarrel within the Local. All who disagree with them are "Kolchaks" and "counterrevolutionists." Never forget that we are in the midst of the revolution all the time. It's here. Note the malignant expression on the faces of those who engage in this.

They get a small following among adolescent youths. There are constant attacks within. Every attempt of the members to do anything for the movement, whether it be raising funds for the national headquarters or trying to arrange for an Amnesty Convention, is blocked with points of order. Insinuations are hurled across the floor, the motives of all who differ with the fanatics are questioned, and bedlam frequently follows. The members get disgusted. More and more of them throw up their hands and say, "Oh, what's the use!" The attendance at meetings constantly declines until instead of 1,000 members there are about 100. Of these 100, 25 or 30 attend the meetings, the Left Wingers always being out in force. At an opportune moment a resolution is introduced supporting the Left Wing organization. The Socialists make a last desperate effort and are outvoted. The Left Wing has what is left of the organization and a report appears in *The Communist* that Local so and so has been captured for the "dictatorship of the proletariat." The "petty bourgeoisie" and the "counterrevolutionists" have been routed.

This has been the experience of most of the locals that have been "captured" by the Left Wing. It has only captured itself but having the name of the Local it parades the hollow shell it has, and informs all and sundry that the "proletariat" has been victorious. In all of the places where this has been done there are masses of comrades who are eager to take up the work of educating the working class but who will have nothing to do with the "Left Wing." They know that the latter cannot live as a party in the United States. They know that if the Left Wing is successful it will drag the Socialist Party underground where it will disappear.

Socialist Party members might as well recognized that there can be no compromise with these factionalists. They are an emotional reflex of the Russian revolution, a cheap parody of the greatest working class victory of all history. What they have done to the Locals they have "captured" they will do to the Party as a whole if they can. It is not a "tidal wave" as they would have it, but a backwash of that bankrupt anarcho-sindicalism that affected many countries down to 1914 when it disappeared in the storm of the world war.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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