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# Circular Letter from Alfred Wagenknecht in Cleveland to “All National Convention Delegates,” August 19, 1919.

Copies in Socialist Party of America Papers, Duke University, microfilm reel 9 and  
Comintern Archive, f. 515, op. 1, d. 4, ll. 21-22.

August 19, 1919.

TO ALL NATIONAL  
CONVENTION DELEGATES.

Comrades: —

Let us consider the party situation in the light of the controversy from a wholly impersonal point of view. Calling comrades liar and thieves, as Adolph Germer has the habit of doing, gets us nowhere and only reflects upon those indulging in such tactics.

The former National Executive Secretary suspended seven language federations and the Socialist Party of Michigan, giving neither an opportunity for defence nor a trial. Several weeks thereafter, this same committee expelled the Socialist Party of Massachusetts. Several weeks after this, the same committee, which constitutionally ceased to hold office and function on July 1, 1919, began voting to expel the Socialist Party of Ohio. The result of this ballot has not yet been made public, although voting closed on August 13th.

The New York State Executive Committee followed the tactics of the National Executive Committee and expelled more than half of the state membership. This means that to date nearly half of the party membership has been “thrown out.” Consider then that the Finnish Socialist Federation with its 10,000 members, the German Socialist Federation with its 6,000 members, and the Scandinavian Socialist Federation with its 3,500 members strongly sympathize with the expelled and suspended elements and you have a number far in excess of half the party membership which protests the acts of the former National Execu-

tive Committee and will be satisfied with nothing less than immediate revocation of these acts at the National Convention, August 30th. The Finnish Socialist Federation issued by its executive committee a proclamation which frankly states that should these “expelled” elements not be reinstated, should it come to a parting of the ways, then they would affiliate with that faction of the party which was truest to socialism, namely, the radical faction. The German Socialist Federation in convention denounced the acts of the former National Executive Committee.

We are face to face then with this problem — with far more than half of the Socialist Party membership pledged in advance of the convention against the acts of the former National Executive Committee, and with this committee still usurping power, what will the delegates to the National Convention do to save the “pieces”?

However, the main point around which these “expelling” acts of the former National Executive Committee revolves is one of principle rather than one of party autocracy or democracy. The elements suspended and expelled from the party were those which demanded that the Socialist Party affiliate with our Russian comrades, change the tactics of the Socialist Party in conformity with lessons taught us by the Russian revolution and the fiasco of the Scheidemanns in Germany, and thereby make sure that our party would not run up a blind alley at the crucial moment.

It was for making this demand, organizing and working toward the end that this demand might be effective, that the wholesale expulsions and suspensions took place.

In the light of recent events, our Russian comrades are about to win against the former Tsarist gen-

eral, Kolchak. The forces of Russian workers have defeated Kolchak, who was backed by allied imperialism. Now Lenin has sent out a dispatch that Denikin will be meted out the same treatment as was given Kolchak. Socialist Russia is proving itself a valiant foe to imperialism and all its hirelings. Socialist Russia is winning. But even if Socialist Russia were to be wrecked upon the rocks of international imperialism tomorrow, if we are the kind of socialists out of which socialist republics are built, we would still be under obligations to aid Russia and to affiliate with the Third International, known as the Communist International.

The former National Executive Committee, composed in the main of moderate socialists, refused again at its last meeting to definitely throw their lot with our Russian comrades. Were they afraid Socialist Russia would lose out against capitalism? This, then, is the breach which caused the party controversy: the moderate socialists on the one hand, forsaking Russia; the radical socialists on the other hand, demanding affiliation with the International called by the Russian socialists.

And now — where do you, a delegate to the National Convention of the Socialist Party, stand? Do you believe that such momentous questions as these, of expelling and suspending nearly half the party membership, should be left in the hands of seven or eight party members, who for the time being happen to be officials? Is this not rather a matter for the membership to decide by referendum? Do you protest against these acts? Do you recognize the former National Executive Committee, which continued to “rule” the party after it was constitutionally outlawed?

And again, do you believe we should affiliate with the Scheidemanns or Mensheviks of Europe? Or shall we cast our lot with the socialists of Russia, Italy, Sweden, Holland, England, France — socialists who are

insistent on demanding a Third International composed of true socialists instead of social patriots.

You are to attend the National Convention at 113 South Ashland Boulevard, Chicago, Ill., on August 30th. You must enter the convention hall with plans and a policy, with definite principles to uphold. The moderate socialists will organize in advance of the convention. Will you meet organization with organization? Or will you meet defeat because you failed to consult with the many other delegates to bring about victory for your principles?

So that all delegates that denounce the acts of the former National Executive Committee and who are in sympathy with the principles for which nearly half the party membership was suspended and expelled may discuss the necessary steps to take when the National Convention convenes, a caucus has been called which will meet in Machinists Hall, 113 South Ashland Blvd., Chicago, August 29th, at 8 pm. Come a day early and attend this caucus. Members of the new National Executive Committee will be present. Party questions will be gone into thoroughly. Decisions will be reached which should make it possible to effect a policy which will be to the best interests of international socialism.

Offices have been rented in the convention hall and typewriters and other accommodations will there be found for your convenience. The undersigned will be in charge and will gladly meet all delegates and give such information as may be valuable in meeting the present emergency and solving it in the interests of true Socialism.

Yours in Comradeship,

A. Wagenknecht,  
Executive Secretary Pro Tem.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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