An Answer to Germer's Criticism

By Louis C. Fraina

IT IS easy to asume attitudes, particularly the attitude of righteous indignation. It is easy to resort to slander and vituperation. These are familar weapons of the man who has no case, of the man who is in the desperation of despair.

This is precisely what Comrade Germer does. His criticism of *The Revolutionary Age* is not a criticism, it is a violent assault; but it is the assault of a desperate weakened enemy, depending wholly upon poison gas. But the artillery and machine guns of our *facts* are more than a match for poison gas attacks.

Comrade Germer fights shy of the essentials of the arguments that *The Revolutionary Age* has been making against him and the National Executive Committee for five months. Let us re-consider these arguments.

On November 26, 1918, two weeks after the German Revolution, Local Boston adopted a resolution for an Emergency National Convention, declaring:

> The revolutionary crisis in Europe, the campaign of the imperialistic press for armed intervention in Russia, and for armed intervention in Germany and Austria should Socialism conquer, projects a crisis in the movement of the American proletariat.
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> The international situation is a call to action—the final struggle is coming between Socialism and Capitalism.
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> In this great crisis, it is imperative that the Socialist Party prepare itself, that it unify itself, that it formulate a policy expressing the requirements of the crisis and the mature judgement of the membership.

That resolution was a clear expression of party necessity and party action. That was five months ago. What did the National Executive Committee do, during these five months of crisis, of the agonized call of the European proletariat to international Socialism, of the collapse of Capitalism and the proletarian revolution in action? Let us re-capitulate (and I shall simply re-state the arguments that *The Revolutionary Age* has been making for five months):

1.—During the greatest crisis in all history, the N. E. C. was dumb and inert. It did not issue any flaming call to the party for action. It dodged all vital issues. It decapitated the party. It clung to petty bourgeois "Socialism"—*an infamous betrayal of trust.*

2.—Local after local of the Party insisted upon action, but the N. E. C. either ignored or sabotaged their appeals.

3.—New ideas, new concepts of action, *a new life,* developed in the Party; but the N. E. C. was as stolid as an iceberg, one member at least stigmatizing the insurgent elements as "anarchistic."

4.—Immediately after the armistice and the German Revolution the N. E. C. should have met; but it did not meet until the end of January—almost three months wasted, three months during which a day was equivalent to years of other periods. Tragic waste and incompetency!

5.—When the N. E. C. did finally meet, it was as an Old Man of the Sea. It was reactionary. It refused to call an emergency Party Convention, in spite of the call of the party membership. It issued no flaming declaration on the world crisis. It was dead, inert, conservative, bureaucratic, on the great issues of a world in revolt.

6.—The N. E. C. decided to send delegates (in implication, affiliation) to the Congress of the Great Betrayal at Berne, the Congress of pro-war Socialists, social-patriots and counter-revolutionary "Socialism."

7.—The N. E. C. refused to call a Party National Convention, but it did issue a call for an "Amnesty" Convention together with bourgeois "liberal" and non-Socialist organizations,—a clear abandonment of the class struggle. (Germer says it would cost money to hold a Party Convention, and the Party is "broke:" but wouldn't it cost money to hold an "Amnesty" Convention? A Party Convention could, moreover, in considering the international crisis, equally and necessarily consider our class war prisoners.)

This is our indictment of the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party. This is the story of its treason to international proletarian solidarity and Socialism,—or, in charity, shall we say "incompetency"?

Comrade Germer's whole letter reeks with declarations and insinuations that we are liars. Yet upon what does he base these serious accusations? Upon one thing: "You add that you have been informed that *at this late date* I made an objection to the Queens County resolution. To me at least it will be interesting to learn who is peddling these falsehoods."

What *The Revolutionary Age* said was this, in its article of March 8:

> We have been informed that Comrade Germer has now made an objection to the Local Queens County motion on the ground that it was initiated by a delegate body.

But this statement was preceded by a passage which clearly indicates that we didn't depend upon that "information." This is the passage:

> The resolution offered by Local Queens has, however, now received the requisitive number of seconds and must be put to a referendum of the membership. But, ever the advocate of strict parliamentary procedure and constitutional law, except in such minor matters as the election of delegates to an International Conference or the decision to align our party with a gang of international assassins, Comrade Germer rules that the motion will first have to be published in the official *Bulletin,* thereby causing a delay anf 15 days or more. In other words, everything is to be done to *aid* the holding of an Amnesty Convention, which apparently nobody, outside of a few officials, desire, while everything is to be done to *delay* the referendum for a National Emergency Convention which is backed by the requisite number of Party branches and locals.

In this it is clear that we knew the Queens County motion was going to referendum. The passage that came further on was simply supplementary. It was an error. But an error is not a lie. Why did not Comrade Germer simply write us that we had been misinformed about his alleged objection? No! His job is to call comrades liars and to cuttle-fish in the momentous issues now agitating the party. And *that* is all Comrade Germer offers to prove us liars! ...

In its attitude, *The Revolutionary Age* has discussed party issues as matters of principles. It has not resorted to defamation of character—as Comrade Germer does. We have a strong case; Germer and his crowd of moderates have not: hence their peculiar tactics.

Our charge against Comrade Germer is that of using obstructionist tactics, not that he refused to initiate a referendum which wasn't framed properly. When he received the Local Boston motion for a referendum on a Party Convention, he knew that it was not properly framed: *why did he not immediately notify the Boston Comrades?* Instead, he sends it out for seconds (knowing its form was unconstitutional), thereby wasting time and sabotaging the Emergency Convention. A Party official should facilitate the processes of the membership, not obstruct them.

Comrade Germer grandiloquently declaims that the Party Constitution is the will of the membership. Of course. But why, then, does Comrade Germer and the N. E. C. violate it? It was unconstitutional for the N. E. C. to "elect" delegates to the Berne Congress. Germer quotes the Constitution: "The duties and powers of the National Executive Committee shall be: (a) to represent the Party in all National and International affairs." Precisely; *but where the Constitution does not otherwise provide.* And the Party Constitution distinctly provides that *International Delegates shall be chosen only by referendum vote of the membership.* The N. E. C., accordingly, deliberately violated the party's "fundamental law."

Why? Comrade Germer says there "was no time to elect by referendum vote." The N. E. C. was in a hury to participate in Berne, but not in a hurry about giving the membership an opportunity to express itself through an Emergency Convention. Why did not the N. E. C. suggest a referendum in November, knowing that an International Congress would be held?

Facts are facts. And the facts are that the "Amnesty" Convention has been used (unsuccessfully) to sabotage the Emergency Convention.

It is disgraceful for Germer to insinuate that we are not interested in our class war prisoners. But we want *action,* not petty bourgeois hot-air. *The Revolutionary Age* is consistently carrying on a propaganda for our class war prisoners, for industrial mass action to liberate them, on the basis of the proletarian class struggle.

It is the N. E. C. that is delaying the liberation of our imprisoned comrades. If they had done their duty, we could have had a Party Convention in January or February, unified our forces and initiated a national *Socialist* campaign for the liberation of our class prisoners. ...

But enough! Comrade Germer's "arguments" are not the real arguments against *The Revolutionary Age* and the Left Wing. No, comrades of the Socialist Party; the issue is one between moderate Socialism and revolutionary Socialism. The N. E. C. majority emphatically expresses that moderate Socialism which in Europe is counter-revolutionary. *That* is the issue! We are frank, Comrade Germer: our purpose is to conquer the Party for revolutionary Socialism.