
An Evening's Experience.

by Max Schonberg

Published in the *New York Call*, March 31, 1919, pg. 6.

Editor of *The Call*:

I wish to call attention to a sidelight of the Left Wing controversy, about which the membership should be informed.

Up to about four and a half years ago I was an active member of the New York movement. I then moved out of New York and have been since then, and am at present, a member of Local Mount Vernon. In these last four and a half years I have had no connection with the New York movement and naturally did not participate in any kind of party disputes that have taken and are now taking place.

When the Left Wing controversy arose, outside of information gained from a reading of the [Left Wing] manifesto, several issues of *The Revolutionary Age*, and the controversial letters in the columns of *The Call*, I had no time to further acquaint myself with the issues involved. I therefore naturally reserved judgment and have not expressed myself publicly or even privately on the subject.

It was under these circumstances that, having an evening at my disposal, I resolved last Monday night to attend a meeting at which the Left Wing position would be presented by its advocates, and found the 3rd-5th-10th AD Branch† to be the only one that was meeting that night at which the question was likely to be discussed. These are the exact facts explaining my presence at the meeting.

When I entered, a certain action of the preceding Central Committee meeting was under discussion. Comrade Gollomb spoke for about 10 or 15 minutes, giving his version of the Central Committee's action in question. After he got through, Jim Larkin, who was in the chair, entered into a shameful tirade of cheap, personal abuse of Gollomb, centering not around the content of what he said, but around his "poor, rotten English" and his many "repetitions." This gave him the opportunity for suggesting that he would entertain a motion for the establishment of a time limit. A five-minute rule was then passed.

It was at this time that a representative of *The Call* asked to be given the privilege of the floor to speak in behalf of *The Call* Printing Plant Company. After first making a speech against permission being granted, reminding the membership that a previous meeting had decided to give no support until *The Call* was party-owned, Larkin stated that he would leave it to the membership present to decide, it being apparent to anyone who could sense the temper of the meeting that Larkin had the majority with him. The result was that *The Call* representative was not granted the floor. He thereupon asked whether he would be granted the floor if he could prove that *The Call* was party-controlled. Larkin assured him that he could prove nothing of the kind, and ordered him to be seated. *The Call* representative then conferred for a few moments with Comrade Gollomb, and when he

†- Local New York was subdivided into branches based on State Assembly Districts. The branch referred to here combined the residents of three different assembly districts.

sat down near me explained that he had asked Gollomb how and when it would be possible for him to get the floor. The significance of this latter incident will be made clear later.

At 10 o'clock a special order of business was taken up — namely, the charges by a group of about 15 members of the branch brought against those in control of the branch. In this connection, a communication from the grievance committee, I believe, was read, requesting the branch to select a committee of three to appear before it and answer the charges. Comrade Brahdly read the charges, and then Larkin threw out the suggestion that such a committee should be chosen, and a motion to that effect was immediately forthcoming. I think it customary at our meetings to have the membership discuss a given motion before the chair does so. That, to Larkin, seems to be only a mere convention, unworthy of notice by a revolutionary proletarian. Holding a copy of the charges before him, he began a vicious attack of bitter invective and vituperation upon each of the individuals whose names were appended to it. After fully 10 minutes of this kind of character assassination, I rose to ask a question. Larkin asked me whether I was a member of the branch. I replied, I was not; but, being a party member, I had the same rights as any other party member, except that of voting. Larkin, not being strong on "rights," decided that I would have to wait until he got through. He continued his tirade for a few minutes longer, and then called on me to ask my question. My exact words were as follows: "Does the five-minute rule passed this evening apply to the chairman equally as well as to all other members?"

Before continuing, it should be made clear that before last Monday night Larkin and I had never met. Being only a member of the rank and file, and not a leader, he did not know me. But after I stated my question, he seemed to be inspired with a thorough knowledge of my character. Flying into a rage, he assured the membership present that *The Call* representative and I were part

of a gang of conspirators, deliberately formed for the purpose of disrupting their meetings, and, to prove his accusation, called attention to the fact that he had seen *The Call* representative confer, first with Comrade Gollumb, and then with me (as explained above). In the light of my explanation of my presence at the meeting, there was as much justification for Larkin in making such a charge as there would be in my accusing him of being a paid agent of the enemies of the Socialist Party, hired to disrupt the movement by bringing about internal dissension. Larkin further assured his audience that I was a blackguard, then played the role of the injured and persecuted martyr by declaring I had insulted him, and then insidiously incited his followers against me in truly demagogic fashion by volunteering the information that I had insulted their intelligence. It worked. The desired motion to expel *The Call* representative and myself from the meeting was immediately made and entertained by the chairman, in spite of the fact that another motion (to elect a committee of three to appear before the grievance committee) was the business before the house, and, in spite of the fact that no branch is empowered to expel a party member from its meeting unless his conduct is such as to make it impossible to go on with the proceedings.

Comrade Brahdly, who, I believe, is an officer of the branch and a Left Winger, and who happens to know me as Larkin does not, made an earnest plea for the defeat of the motion, vouching for my absolute integrity. Comrade Gollomb followed, also speaking against the motion. I did not hear all he said, but later was informed that in the course of his remarks he is alleged to have threatened the chairman with physical force. At any rate, I saw Larkin suddenly rush from the platform down the aisle to where Gollomb sat, with the clear intent of beating him up. Everybody rose from their seats shouting; a small-sized riot was imminent, and one member did strike at Gollomb, but, fortunately, order was soon restored. Gollomb con-

tinued his remarks, stating that the chair had completely misinterpreted him; that what he really did say was that if Larkin played the game of casting suspicions and innuendos against other comrades, the same game could be played against him. After he sat down, Larkin was ready to put the question. I rose and asked whether I would be given the opportunity to defend myself. Larkin imperiously decided against me. The motion was put and carried, and I left the meeting.

Any member present, with an elementary sense of fairness, will agree that I have given an accurate account of what transpired up to the time I left. I have gone into some detail so that the membership may know the spirit in which the meeting was carried on. I want to assure the comrades that my writing this letter is not due to any feeling of personal wrong done me. But what is the significance of the entire affair? Simply this: Here was a meeting conducted in such a manner as to accomplish what? Nothing. Nothing was done toward building and strengthening our organization. Nothing was done toward clarifying the difference of opinion now existing within the party on the basis of honest and sincere discussion. Larkin was the whole show and set the example of engaging in bitter and outrageous

vilification of personalities, unprincipled character assassination, in mean innuendoes, in the casting of unfounded and unwarranted suspicions, in gorilla-like terrorism, physical and intellectual, in appealing to base prejudices, all flowing from narrow, bigoted partisanship and unquestionably tending toward disruption within our ranks.

I do not wish to imply an indictment of the Left Wing group as a group. I do not believe that the methods I witnessed are used in any other branches. At least, I hope not. I know many comrades who take the Left Wing position, and know them to be of unquestioned sincerity, and I believe they should be heard. I surely do not wish to be misunderstood as reflecting upon the validity of the Left Wing program. As I said in the beginning, I am still seeking light and learning. But I do hope that all sincere comrades, be they Left, Right, or Center, or just good socialists, will repudiate the deplorable methods engendered by Larkin in his branch.

Fraternally yours,

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