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# The Party Situation in New York.

by John Reed

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Attributed to Editor John Reed. Associate Editor was Eadmonn MacAlpine.

## The Inquisition.

With the rise to power of the Left Wing organization within the Socialist Party in New York City, the local officialdom instituted a variety of new regulations and committees governing those within the party and those who would within the party be. Not the least offensive of these was the creation of a committee of three for the purpose of grilling applicants for membership in the Socialist Party.

In the past the party has been very lax regarding the admission of new members, practically anyone who signed an application blank being admitted without question. This fact has often been pointed out by many of those members who now constitute the Left Wing, but without result. But those who suggested a change in the method of admitting new members had no idea of handing the control of the growth of the party in this city over to a few handpicked individuals. The most common suggestion made was that branches should exercise, through their executive or membership committees, a stricter control in this matter.

The creation of this committee, or Star Chamber Extraordinary as it now functions, is clearly not a matter of coincidence. It is a direct attempt by those at present in control to perpetuate themselves. Apparently the Right Wing believes that the present trend of events in the world at large will result in the rise of such revolutionary sentiment that it behooves the party to be very careful in admitting new members, lest the influx of revolutionary recruits overwhelm the present officialdom and give the Left Wing control of the party. The net result of the creation of this Star Chamber is the holding up of hundreds of applications and the consequent loss to our movement of the services of men and women whose eyes have been opened to their

economic conditions through the pressure of world events. The fact that over 90 percent of the hundreds of applicants so held up are working men and women, members of that class in society which we claim to be the voice, merely strengthens the assumption that this whole proceeding is a political move in the interest of the machine. While some of the questions asked by this amateur Overman Committee clearly show that the applicant's knowledge of, or sympathy with, the socialist movement is not the real point at issue.

The following is an account of these third degree methods by one of the victims:

Together with several would be "comrades," I waited one Sunday morning, before locked doors at the appointed hour for those anointed by the Lord to arrive, to put us through our tests. While waiting, we exchanged experiences as to how many times we had come before, etc. I was told how the Sunday previous 50 or more working men had waited in vain for over an hour and finally had gone away with their object unachieved. One comrade remarked, "They don't want us in the party now" — but just as I was beginning to lose all hope of being a "party member," our Chief Examiner arrived and unlocked Room 505. We filed in and whiled away the time reading our socialist papers and waiting for Chief Examiner No. 2. Finally he too arrived and the Holy of the Holies was opened, and in we went, one by one, to meet our fate.

"Why are you joining the party now?" was the first question. Remembering the law of the land, that one is assumed to be innocent until proven guilty, we took courage and replied: "Because it seems the psychological moment." This seemed to pass and we waited breathlessly for the next "test," which was whether we were born in this country. Reassuringly bulwarked by the fact that our ancestors since 16-something had been born here, and we likewise, we answered in the affirmative. Whether we stood by the statement printed on our pink application card, which was taken from a box where it had lain for some seven weeks, was also answered in the affirmative.

Here the examination seemed to be over, and we were told there would be apparently no further difficulty as to our membership. We prepared to leave, when suddenly Chief Examiner No. 1, who had stood by silently during the

proceedings, shot out the question, "Do you know anyone in the 3rd, 5th, and 10th Assembly District Branch?" Remembering our conversation with the comrade who had assured us that we were not wanted in the party, we scrambled frantically in our brains for some innocuous-sounding Anglo-Saxon names, carefully avoiding all Celtic origin, and found two. These seemed also to pass.

With a sigh of relief we left the building, feeling sure our red card was as good as in our pocket: but to date — two months since application — we are still cardless.

### **Representation in the City Central Committee.**

Owing to the fact that the machinery of the party is in the control of the Right Wing, many opportunities occur whereby the machine consolidates itself. While all branches known to have a majority of Right Wing members are given their full quota of delegates to the Central Committee, branches known to be controlled by the Left Wing or suspected of harboring a strong minority of Left Wing members are wherever possible deprived of their full representation. This especially applies to the various Russian language branches. For example, the 1st (downtown) branch of the Russian Federation was given only 2 delegates, after protest by the branch it was given three delegates, although its full representation is at least 4 if not 5 delegates. The 20th Branch of the Ukrainian Federation has only two delegates, although according to the bylaws it is entitled to 4 or 5.

### **Gerrymandering.**

Another of the methods recently brought into play by the Right Wing of the party is the gerrymander — a tactical maneuver which calls forth voluble denunciation by the Socialist Party when practiced by either of the old parties. The gerrymander is a scheme or reorganizing districts so as to divide the forces of the opposition. It is not a particularly vicious political move and, indeed, in capitalist circles has come to be looked upon as one of the little privileges of the party in power. But the Majority Socialists have always affected righteous indignation when they were the victims and profess to believe that it is a vicious method of foiling the "will of the people." Now, however, that officialdom faces insurgency it immediately discovers in the gerrymander a friend indeed, and it proceeds to

attempt the reorganization of several branches in order, if we are to believe its previous arguments, to foil the will of the people, who in this particular case are the membership of the Socialist Party. The 2nd Jewish Branch has been so reorganized and the 17th AD Branch is at present in the throes of the gerrymander.

Where the case is so hopeless that the gerrymander is useless more violent measures are resorted to, as in the case of the 3rd, 5th, and 10th AD and 8th AD Branches, both of which have charges pending against them which it is sincerely hoped (by the Right Wing) will result in their expulsion from the Socialist Party.

### **The Party Press.**

One of the immediate points of issue between the Right and Left Wings is the ownership and control of the party press, the Right Wing taking the attitude that the status quo should be maintained — to all intents and purposes the machine within the party controls the press when it comes to matters of party policies and tactics. Officialdom is invariably in the position of the stand-patter. Thus when the party press remains silent on the matter it is playing the game of the machine.

In all appeals for moral and financial support, which from time to time are issued by party papers, one of the strongest arguments advanced is that the membership will have a paper which will present its views and which, by virtue of the absence of financial control through subsidies or advertisements, will present the truth on all occasions. Yet when a powerful minority arises within the party, the official press refuses to acquaint the membership with the fact. *The Call*, through its Board of Management, has refused to give any publicity to the Left Wing organization, even going to the length of refusing to advertise meetings held under its auspices as such, and the Left Wing can only insert notices of its meetings by camouflaging under the name of a committee or some other body. *The Call* says in effect, "We will accept your advertisements but we will not print the name of your organization" and thus it maintains the fiction of a "free press" for which it is always ostensibly fighting.

*The Jewish Daily Forward*, an official organ of the Socialist Party, takes much the same attitude towards the Left Wing but in other matters it goes so far

to the right as to refuse to print the names of party members who may have fallen under the displeasure of the government. It refuses to advertise the *Novyi Mir*, the official organ of the Russian Federation, although this body is part of the Socialist Party, in fact occupying in relation to the party exactly the same position as does the Jewish Federation.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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