
Report of the National Convention at Chicago.

by John C. Taylor

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To the Membership

At this, the gravest moment in the history of our movement, we beg of you, one and all, to be calm and deliberate and consider the matter of our affairs before you move in any direction.

Your six delegates went to Chicago of one mind; we have returned — not divided, but of one mind. We did the very best we could do — in fact, we did the only thing we could do, and all that we ask at this moment is that you make every effort to thoroughly understand the situation. We are not afraid; we have nothing to cover or to apologize for, and we beg that the light of day be now let in. Our leaders are continuing their abuse; by lies and deceit and by covering up as much as possible they hope to ameliorate their position. The matter is now in your hands; you are to be the judge. Let your delegates appear before you and explain all. The State Office will arrange for at least one of your delegates to appear before your local. Write us for a date, and if you prefer one delegate or another state your preference.

Less than two months ago the 3,000 comrades of this state overwhelmingly elected six delegates to represent them at the Emergency National Convention to be held at Chicago on August 30, 31, and September 1, 1919. That convention is now a matter of record, and as one of the delegates who attended, I shall take this early opportunity to acquaint you with what happened there.

On Friday afternoon of the 29th, the day preceding the convention, the six delegates from California met at the Machinists' Building just a block from our National Headquarters. The upper hall in this building had been rented by Adolph Germer, our National Secretary, in which to hold the convention. The lower hall had been rented by A. Wagenknecht, the newly appointed National Secretary. On entering the building we found many delegates informally discussing the situation. The question that was uppermost in the minds of all was whether we should immediately call to order the Left Wing convention or

attend the convention upstairs. It was the unanimous opinion of those there that we should by all means attend the convention upstairs and do all in our power to right matters upon the floor of the convention. This decision delighted us from California, five of whom had previously met and determined that this was the only course to pursue. We had come to the convention uninstructed, but we knew the sentiment of our comrades, and we were determined to act in keeping with their desires. We were individuals, uninstructed, but with a common purpose and of but one mind.

Having settled upon this important matter, we went across the street to the National Headquarters, where we met and talked to Adolph Germer, [George] Goebel, [Frederick] Krafft, [Patrick] Hogan, and others, and during this visit there was nothing said by any of them, to any of us, regarding our credentials or that our standing was being questioned or that we should have to obtain white cards of admission. I mention this to show their lack of good faith in dealing with

us. We were told, however, that the convention would open at 10 am at the hall across the way in keeping with the call.

The following morning at 9:40 am I entered the convention hall and took my seat with the California delegates who were there ahead of me. About 20 others were seated near us. We were wondering why so few were present, as it was drawing near to the time set for convening, when Adolph Germer, entering at the rear, shouted in a loud voice, "Everybody please leave this hall." We asked if the convention was not to be opened here and he admitted it was. Someone remarked that we were there to attend. He roared, "Have you white cards of admission?" We answered that we had not; we had red [party] cards and pink credentials furnished by himself, but no white cards. "Well, then, I shall ask you in a comradely way to leave the hall, but if you don't leave, we have the necessary means at hand of clearing the hall." This in a loud, stern voice. John Reed remarked that if that was the way he felt about it, he had better go ahead and put us out. Germer replied, "All right, officers, clear the hall!"

From among us sprang an officer in plain clothes, and jerking the chairs from under us, ordered us out, at the same time calling upon fully a dozen uniformed police who had been hidden near by, to assist him. They proceeded to move us forcefully, shoving and hurrying us along.

Finding ourselves outside, we hurriedly determined to get white cards, so we went across the street to headquarters and separately asked for passes to the convention and we were told separately that we could not have them.

On returning to the convention we found the stairway leading to the hall manned by police acting as doorkeepers. They allowed no one to pass without a white card. Standing room was not allowed us until after the convention had been opened and not until after 1 pm. A room at one side was opened in which possible 150 people could stand, and there for the greater part of the first two days your delegates STOOD in the heat, while the steamroller worked effectively. As I was allowed to pass into this room about 2 pm, the question of why the police were used and who were responsible for them was being discussed on the floor. Berger, Krafft, Goebel, and others couldn't account for them at all, but finally Germer, under fire,

became overwrought and said, "Well, then, if you insist on knowing, the Chicago police are taking orders from the Socialist Party."

That little puzzle solved, the committee on credentials was elected. The rules of order were adopted, provided that all committees should consist of 7 members, but in this case the rules were amended so that 15 might sit on this one. Of course, you understand, the smaller the committee the greater the speed, and the reverse is also true. This committee adjourned, and just before 6 pm reported that it would take some time to go over the credentials of all contested delegates, and that it would take up the credentials of Arizona, California, and Colorado at 8 pm that evening, and be ready to report on them at 2 pm the following day. The chairman, Seymour Stedman, stated it would be impossible to go on with the business of the convention without changing the order of business, which provided for full report of the committee on credentials being presented first. No one seemed to pay any attention to this statement, and presently he repeated it, and five minutes later he very emphatically repeated it a third time. It was apparent to all that he was inviting a motion to change the order of business so that the convention could proceed without the contested delegates. Oliver Wilson admitted he "spilled the beans" by moving to adjourn till 2 pm the following day, which was carried.

That you may know how many delegates were on the floor during the first day, I can state that several times on voting, the count stood 88 against 33. It was very evident that 33 comrades would not stand for steamroller tactics.

In the evening at 8:30 o'clock, Comrades Dolsen and myself appeared before the credentials committee for the California delegates. Adolph Germer read a communication signed by Cameron H. King and Elvina S. Beals protesting our being seated on the ground that our ballots were not counted by the proportional representative system as adopted by our State Executive Committee before election. They failed to state, however, that because of the general complaints being received from locals against the proportional system, the State Executive Committee decided to count the ballots by the usual system, which they had a perfect right to do. They also complained that we had not heeded the demand of Adolph Germer that

the expelled Foreign Federations be not allowed to participate in the election of delegates. We showed that the ballots, while being counted, were not tabulated with the votes of the rest and, of course, had no effect in the election.

When these two charges had blown up, they questioned our good faith. That we had been members of the party, some of us for 20 years, working and sacrificing for the cause, that we had come 2,000 miles through dust and heat, and that we had drawn considerably upon our own funds for traveling expenses, were not evidence enough of our good faith, so they decided that we should not be seated and so reported to the convention.

At 2 pm the second day [Aug. 31], on the stroke of the clock the gavel hammered for order. The whole scene was one of confusion, while police held the crowds back as delegates were taking their seats. One could scarcely hear above the noise as chairman Stedman called for the report of the committee on credentials. Their chairman immediately reported that they could not report for a half hour, and then they could give but a partial report. Immediately someone made the motion that the adopted order of business be amended, so that the report of another committee could be received. This motion was seconded and hurriedly passed. There were not one-fourth of the delegates in their chairs when this piece of business was enacted. Comrade [Joseph] Coldwell of Rhode Island objected to taking up further business until such a time as the credentials committee had reported in full on all contested delegates and all DULY ELECTED DELEGATES seated. These objections were overruled, as the motion had just been passed, and it was so ordered. Comrade Coldwell then arose and said he would not be a party to any such contemptible tactics and that he should withdraw until such a time as they had seen fit to mend their ways, and he asked all delegates who stood for justice and fair play to do likewise.

Confusion still reigned, few knew what was taking place, but right there we decided that it would be useless for us to stand about longer wasting our time hoping the police would slack their vigilance and let us in. Ninety-eight delegates met immediately downstairs. The convention of the Socialist Party was called to order by the newly appointed National Secretary, A. Wagenknecht. Heartily did we sing “The Interna-

tionale” and “The Red Flag,” and then down to work we got; all our committees were elected and hard at work before 6 pm.

The next morning — the third day [Sept. 1] — at 10 o’clock, on convening we sang many songs and put so much ginger in them that the police were sent from upstairs to ask us to lay off. Needless to say, we sang a few more and then all were ready for work. Our credentials committee had gone over all the credentials that night and had a complete report to make. Three only were refused, one of these being seated as a fraternal delegate. Every now and then a delegate from above would come to us, asking admission, saying they had enough of the steamroller upstairs; then all would rise and sing a catchy tune:

Glor-ious, Glor-ious,
We’ll make the Bolshevik victorious;
Praise to the Plutes, they’re making more of us,
While GENE lies in prison for us all.

At 4 pm the sergeant at arms reported to me that the convention had reversed their decision and had decided to seat the California delegates. We six counseled among ourselves and decided to make a statement of our position which should be read to the convention upstairs by Comrade [James] Dolsen. In effect it was that we could not accept seats unless they were willing to seat ALL DULY ELECTED DELEGATES. We realized that they might and probably would seat one now and then, but there was no hope that they would seat enough so that their great majority would be threatened. More than one-third of all delegates were not seated and their credentials committee did not make its full report till the last day, so we were borne out in our supposition that this would be their game.

The fourth day [Sept. 2] found us busily engaged in committee sessions and little business was attended to on the floor.

The fifth day [Sept. 3] it was apparent that we should have to find more suitable headquarters, as the hall in which we were meeting would not seat more than 200 persons and hundreds were clamoring for admission. The committee on ways and means found that the hall belonging to the Industrial Workers of the World, only two blocks away, could be had, so we made this hall our headquarters for the duration of

the convention. This hall would seat 1500 people and had committee rooms and all necessary conveniences. It was here that the new platform was written and adopted. It is short, but conclusive. You will find it in another part of this bulletin. The essential difference between the program adopted by our convention and that of the old is that we expect to make use of mass action in the capture of political power, while they put their entire faith in dropping a piece of paper in the ballot box as the all-necessary instrument of capturing political power.

The sixth day [Sept. 4] we spent entirely in working out the platform and hearing the report on program and labor. Many splendid speeches were made. Mass action and political power and parliamentary action were thoroughly discussed and defined.

The seventh and last day [Sept. 5] was spent in making certain changes in the constitution and electing the 5 comrades who were to sit as the National Executive Committee. Comrades [Alexander] Bilan of Ohio, [Jack] Carney of Minnesota, [Ludwig] Katterfeld of Kansas, [Edward] Lindgren of New York, and Max Bedacht of California were chosen as our new committeemen, and A. Wagenknecht was selected as the National Secretary.

It was decided that the name of the party should from now on be known as THE COMMUNIST LABOR PARTY OF AMERICA and that the headquarters should be at Cleveland, Ohio, for the time being.

We decided to call a National Convention in May 1920, at which time we would nominate without doubt as our candidates for President and Vice President, Gene Debs and Kate Richards O'Hare.

At 11 pm we informally gathered in the front of the hall and for a half hour we made the welkin ring with song and cheer for Debs and all class-war prison-

ers, the new party, the Bolsheviki, and the Revolution.

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P.S.— The expelled comrades from Michigan and Massachusetts with the Russian comrades had for some time previous called a convention for September 1, at which time a Communist Party was to be launched. September 1 found them with some 200 Russian delegates and a few Americans from Michigan and Massachusetts occupying a hall in a different part of Chicago. Although there is not practical difference in the platform written by them and ourselves, it was impossible to get the two gatherings under one roof. They seemed to be imbued with the idea that the mantle of Elijah had been cast upon them and that nothing else mattered. Daily we sent our committees and as individuals we waited upon them and pleaded for unity upon any proper basis, but they steadfastly refused all offers. Only as individuals might we seek admission to their convocation, and it was made plain that many of us were not wanted at all; for instance, it was stated that the California delegates had not openly recorded themselves as Left Wingers and that we were not acceptable.

Our opinion is that the very sincere Russian delegates are following a group of extremely mortal comrades and that they will presently awake to this situation, and then unity will be possible. Looking forward to this end, we have a standing committee whose business it is to continue their efforts for the amalgamation of the two parties. Once they lose faith in their leaders, the two will fuse, as there is no difference of principles.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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