

---

# Socialist Party Convention Rejects the United Front.

by John Pepper

Published in *The Worker* [New York], v. 6, whole no. 277 (June 2, 1923), pg. 4.

## **The Unique Socialist Party — An Opportunist Sect.**

The Socialist Party convention [New York: May 19-22, 1923] was a debacle without equal.

The Socialist Party collapsed ideologically before the war. The Socialist Party collapsed as an organization after the war. It lives today only as an invalid. Its convention is like the hand-organ of an invalid. This hand-organ can plan only a few melodies, for it is itself an invalid. At times it plays “The Red Flag,” at times “The Star Spangled Banner,” at times “The Marseillaise.” And all the melodies and organ-grinding are but a pretext for the old cripple to beg his nickels and dimes as dues.

The whole history of the Socialist Party in recent years has shown every thinking worker that the Socialist Party has no program, no organization, no campaigns. This last convention has shown that the Socialist Party hasn't even leaders. It was a pitiful spectacle to see the few delegates, without initiative, without thoughts.

The leaders of the Socialist Party — both the Right Wing and the Left Wing — simply deserted the convention. Hillquit and Berger sailed to Europe. Debs confined himself to a banquet speech outside of the convention. Scott Nearing did not participate at all. Only [James] Oneal and [Otto] Branstetter were present as the representatives of the petty Tammany Hall of the Socialist Party officialdom. It was like a small town show without stars, with second raters, and even with amateurish supers.

*There was not one speech in this convention which attempted to analyze the political and industrial situation in this country.* Not a single resolution which at-

tempted to point out the tasks of the working class in the present situation, or at least the role of the Socialist Party. The emptiest convention of the smallest trade union is more instructive and richer in content than this so-called National Convention of a so-called political workers' party. This convention has definitely shown that the Socialist Party is a sect which is out of contact with the real political life of the United States, and with the real needs of the working class. It may sound paradoxical, but it is true nonetheless, that in spite of its opportunism, the Socialist Party is nothing but a sect. We are accustomed to consider opportunism and reformism as maladies of mass parties. But the Socialist Party is a freak — an opportunist sect. In this respect it is a real American product, suitable for Barnum, like the Bearded Lady, the Missing Link, or the Tiniest Midget. The Socialist Party of America is the midget among the opportunist parties.

## **The Socialist Party is an Appendix of the Lower Middle Class.**

What has this convention done? What was its biggest achievement? The screaming headline of in the *New York Call* gives the answer: “Socialists Reject Workers Party United Front.” The biggest achievement therefore of this convention is *negative*. That is no mere accident. The Socialist Party has not a single *positive* answer to the needs of the working class. The Socialist Party has no answer to the challenge of the capitalist offensive for the Open Shop. The recent mergers in industry are no problem for the Socialist Party. The Socialist Party is not interested in the sufferings of the farmers. The Socialist Party does not dare to notice the great preparedness of the army and the navy for

the next war. The Socialist Party has no answer whatsoever to all these flaming and burning questions. These questions did not even exist for the Socialist Party convention. The only important thing for the Socialist Party was to reject the call of the Workers Party for a United Front in the interests of the working class, and as an answer to the challenge of the capitalists and the preparedness of the government.

But we do not wish to be unjust. The Socialist Party has in fact noticed one question in the rich industrial and political life of America. One single campaign has indeed been launched by the Socialist Party Convention — a campaign for the impeachment of Chief Justice Taft for receiving an annuity of \$10,000 from the Carnegie Foundation. Indeed, a big issue! The capitalists are seeking to prolong the hours of work! The Republicans intend to choose the Open Shop as the issue for the campaign of 1924! Unscrupulous speculation is raising the cost of living for the workers from day to day! The trade unions will be smashed without amalgamation! In scores of states we have anti-syndicalist and anti-sedition laws! Free speech is nowhere guaranteed for the working class! The United States government is preparing new intervention in China! And yet the only serious campaign of the Socialist Party is the impeachment of Chief Justice Taft. It is characteristic in the highest degree that the Socialist Party has stolen even this slogan. The campaign against Taft is the possession of the Hearst papers. It was created by the New York American and by other typical yellow expressions of the lower middle class. The SP has degraded itself to an ideological appendix of the lower middle class.

### **The Russian Chief-Command.**

Why does the Socialist Party reject the United Front with the Workers Party?

The Socialist Party has a whole string of pretexts. 1. The Russian *chief-command*. The Socialist Party says that the Workers Party is being commanded from Moscow by the Russian Communists. That is, of course, ridiculous and untrue. The Communist International is a world party with a centralized leadership, and has an international discipline. The Workers Party recognizes that discipline. The Russian Party is only 1 of 56 parties which compose the Communist

International. Of course, it is the greatest and most influential. It has so far been the only party which has been able to lead the working class to a permanent victory. It sounds especially comical when the Socialist Party of America makes this accusation against us. The SP is almost entirely led by Russians — Morris Hillquit, Abraham Cahan, Meyer London, [Abraham] Shiplacoff, Jacob Panken, etc., are all Russian Jews. And if we had to choose between the Russian leadership of New York and the Russian leadership from Moscow, we would rather choose Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Radek, and Bukharin.

### **Who is Un-American?**

The second pretext of the Socialist Party against the United Front with the Workers Party is that the Workers Party is not good enough respectable company. The Workers Party is mainly composed of “damned foreigners,” while the Socialist Party is a party of real Americans. The membership figures of the SP show that almost half of it consists of Foreign Language Federations, and when we examine more closely the so-called English-speaking elements in the SP, we see that even these are mainly foreign-born, principally Jewish elements. It is a well known fact that Jewish workers and small Jewish businessmen, even more so, assimilate the language much more quickly than the Polish, Italian, or South Slavic workers of the basic industries. We would advise the Socialist Party to try to ask the Ku Klux Klan or the Daughters of the American Revolution whether they believe the Socialist Party to be a genuine American Party.

A few months ago at the Cleveland Conference [for Progressive Political Action], even the Socialist Party was still ashamed to use the mean accusation of un-Americanism. A statement of the SP delegation at Cleveland says the following:

Nor can we agree with the sentiment that the Workers Party or any other organization should be excluded because it is alleged to be un-American. It ill becomes any member of a labor organization to resort to phrases used by the most reactionary interests in creating prejudice against organized labor.

With this statement the Socialist Party directs the strongest criticism against its own degradation.

### **Against Amalgamation.**

Those were mainly pretexts. Now we should like to speak of the real reasons.

The first real reason against the United Front is the stand of the Socialist Party towards amalgamation. The SP is an ally of the Gompers bureaucracy, and is therefore an enemy of amalgamation. The craft unions are no longer sufficiently effective as weapons against the bosses. Even Eugene V. Debs writes in connection with the great strikes of last summer:

The only reason that the brave soldiers who fought these heroic battles against starvation went down to ignominious defeat, thousands of them having been rewarded with the blacklist in addition to their lost jobs, is that they fought under a craft unions instead of industrial union standard, and consequently became the prey either of their misleaders or of the designs of their masters and exploiters.

The SP Convention has not a word for amalgamation of craft unions into industrial unions, and still less any word against the misleaders of organized labor. The Socialist Party is an ally of the treacherous trade union bureaucracy against the working class, and it must therefore reject the United Front with the Workers Party against the treacherous bureaucracy, in the interest of the working class.

### **For Cleveland, Against Chicago.**

The second real reason for the Socialist Party's rejection of the United Front with the Workers Party is the stand of the Socialist Party towards the Labor Party. The Socialist is today an ally of the Johnston-Stone clique which had the machine of the Cleveland Conference [Dec. 11-12, 1922] in its power, and therefore it has to be against the creation of a Labor Party. Two decisions of the Convention show with crystal clearness the position of the SP. One decision, to continue with the participation in the Conference for Progressive Political Action, and the other to reject the invitation to the July 3rd Convention of the Farmer-Labor Party. What do these decisions mean? It is an open betrayal to continue the affiliation with the Conference for Progressive Political Action, and *at the same time* to boycott the Chicago Convention of July 3rd. The Conference for Progressive Political Action is to-

day abandoned by all militant elements, is nothing but an attempt to hinder the creation of an independent Labor Party, in favor of the attempts of the LaFollette group to create a lower middle class Third Party. The July 3rd Convention will mean the first step on a mass scale to the formation of a real Labor Party. The Conference for Progressive Political Action means the systematic obstruction against a Labor party. Participation in the July 3rd Chicago Convention means an alliance with all militant elements of the American labor movement. Continuation of affiliation with the Conference for Progressive Political Action means today nothing but an alliance with one part of the reactionary officialdom of the labor movement. The Socialist Party has betrayed the idea of a Labor party, and for that reason it rejects the United Front with the Workers Party which conducts a hard struggle for the Labor Party.

### **An Agent of the Capitalists.**

The Socialist Party rejects the United Front with the Workers Party because it has degraded itself to an accomplice of the agents of the capitalists. The SP is the ally of Gompers, who is the worst and most open agent of the capitalists within the labor movement. The SP is against amalgamation, that is, it is for the weakening of the trade unions, for the defeat of strikes, for the victory of the bosses. The SP is the ally of [William H.] Johnston and [Edward] Keating, who in turn are the allies of LaFollette. The SP is therefore an agent of the lower middle class progressives within the ranks of the working class.

In Wisconsin, Victor Berger and the entire Socialist Party dwell quite openly in one camp with the middle class politicians. At the St. Joseph trial against the Communists [Foster trial: March 12-April 6, 1923], the Socialist Party solidarized itself not only with the political agents of the capitalists, but directly with the agents of the Department of Justice. The Socialist Party adopts a resolution for the recognition of Soviet Russia, and solidarizes itself with Abe Cahan's Jewish lies, as much as with the anti-Semitic lies of the *New York Herald*. The SP has no religious or racial prejudices against lies if they are suitable as slander against Soviet Russia. In obstructing the United Front the Socialist Party becomes an agent of the capitalists,

because it thereby splits the forces of militant workers, prevents the development of the trade unions, checks the defensive of organized labor against the Open Shop.

And the Socialist Party is an agent of the capitalists not only on a national, but also on an international scale. The SP Convention has adopted a resolution which makes possible the union with Scheidemann, Noske, Vandervelde, and Branting, with the Hungarian Social Democracy, with the Polish Socialist Party, and will all other betrayers of the proletarian revolution and bloody executioners of rebelling workers. We believe we have the right to demand a reckoning from all those elements in the Socialist Party who do not belong to the petty Tammany Hall of Hillquit and Berger. Why hasn't Debs defended the Russian Workers' Republic against the shameless Cahan? Why did not Scott Nearing lift his voice against the betrayal of the Labor Party? Why did not James Maurer defend the resolution for participation in the Chicago July 3rd Convention, when the Pennsylvania Federation of Labor, of which he is President, agreed to participate in that convention? How could those who favored an International without social peace in the end vote for unity with wartime ministers, lackeys of royalty, and bloodhounds?

### **The United Front for All That!**

But notwithstanding the betrayal on the part of the Socialist Party leaders and the Socialist Party Convention, the Workers Party still seeks to establish the United Front with the workers in and around the Socialist Party. In spite of all efforts of SP leaders, we already have the United Front with parts of the rank and file of the SP. We have the United Front with the Italian Federation of the SP in the struggle against Fascismo. We have the United Front with Socialist Party workers in California within the Labor Party. We have the United Front with SP workers in Pittsburgh in the defense of persecuted Communists. We had the United Front with SP workers of Philadelphia in the May Day celebration.

We still seek the United Front because it is indispensable in the defense struggle of the workers against the capitalists.

### **Two Falsifications.**

The answer of the SP Convention to the Workers Party states an untruth when it says that Communists want the United Front only as a maneuver to show up the Socialist Party leaders. And it is a deliberate falsification when James Oneal, Chairman of the Resolutions Committee, attempts to array Communist documents against us. He claims that the December 1921 theses of the Executive Committee of the Communist International state that the Communists should take part "In the creation of the United Front, not for the purpose of making it effective, but for the purpose of strengthening the Communists." That is a fraud. This phrase is not contained in the December 1921 theses of the Executive of the Communist International. We demand of James Oneal to quote this phrase or even a similar thought in the text. He will not succeed. This thought has been falsely put into the theses of the Communist International by him or by his friends.

The second falsification concerns a letter by Karl Radek. The reply of the Resolutions Committee of the SP Convention to the Workers Party says, "It is also a matter of common knowledge" that Radek has written a letter in which he says that the United Front "was only a tactical maneuver." That is also a fraud, Radek has never written such a letter. It is incumbent upon James Oneal to make public the text of this letter. If not, he and his committee will appear as miserable forgers in the eyes of every honest worker.

The very contrary is the truth. The Comintern has always declared that the tactic of the United Front is no stratagem for us, but is the mightiest weapon against the capitalists and the only rescue for the unity of the trade unions. Zinoviev, Chairman of the Communist International, said at the 4th Congress [Nov. 5-Dec. 5, 1922]:

Therefore, comrades, our tactic of the United Front is not presented only as a strategy against our enemies. Of course, we have the full right and the duty to evolve strategical plans against our enemies; but the United Front is presented because of the whole historical situation, because of its economic world political situation, and because of the situation within the labor movement. If what I have told you concerning the policy of the 2nd and 2-and-1/2 Internationals is correct, if it is true that for the future they are preparing a deliberate systematic splitting of the

trade unions and the working class, our tactic of the United Front results unavoidably therefrom. It follows that for these reasons and for many other reasons we must begin a counter-effort against this plan of the 2nd International. And that is the tactic of the United Front.

The speech from which this quotation is taken appeared in the German Book, *The Communist International on the Advance*, by G. Zinoviev, Karl Hoym, Hamburg, 1923. The excerpt is on page 62.

And we in America can add: We want amalgamation, we want to resist the Open Shop, we want the Labor Party, and therefore we will continue to struggle for the United Front of all the workers.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

*Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2006. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.*