
Socialists Open Convention After “Lefts” Are Ousted: Police and Department of Justice Take Notes as Party’s Proceedings are Opened in Chicago — Important Committee is Selected.

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Published in the *New York Call*, v. 12, no. 243 (Aug. 31, 1919), pp. 1-2.

CHICAGO, Aug. 30 [1919].— The National Emergency Convention of the Socialist Party here was running smoothly and in workmanlike manner at the end of its first day, despite all predictions and fears to the contrary.

Stenographic reports are being taken for three sources — the National Office of the party, the Police Department of Chicago, and the Department of Justice — in itself a commentary of the “reaction” of the party. “Just regular business” is the reason the police stenographer gives for his presence, while the government is silent.

Very little remains of the Left Wing as a rival or even a disrupting force in the party. It is practically certain there will be no Left Wing convention. The convention will adopt a stand, expressed in a manifesto that is expected to satisfy all those in the Left Wing who are contending for what they believe to be revolutionary principles. The others probably will be gathered back into the folds of the various “progressive” wings of the old parties, from which they emerged to play a brief role as ultra-revolutionists.

Late this afternoon the most important committee of the convention was elected, the Committee on Credentials. It consists of Judge Jacob Panken, of New York, chairman; Oscar Amerin-

ger, Milwaukee; Robert Howe; Martin F. Plunkett, Connecticut; William J. Van Nessen, Pittsburgh; and James Reid, of Rhode Island. Open session will be held by the committee, on whose action will depend the amount of ill or good will which the convention will create within the party for years to come.

National Secretary Adolph Germer opened the convention, and Seymour Stedman, of Chicago, was chosen as chairman of the day.

The hall presents a businesslike appearance. It is far from ornate, and there is no gallery. The spectators, who are about evenly divided as to their “Left” and “Right” views, are seated to the left, in an anteroom, separate from the main hall by a curtain, which has been raised. Admission to the main hall is by a special card, issued only to uncontested delegates and the press.

The opening had been set for 10 o’clock, but it was 11:30 before Germer called the convention to order. And abortive attempt of the Left Wing to seat their delegates by obtaining early possession of the hall delayed things considerably, and the examining of credentials of newly arrived delegates consumed more time.

At about 9 o’clock Germer was informed that the convention hall was being occupied by per-

sons known to be contested delegates and others who were not even elected. He hurried over to the hall, which is only one block distant from national headquarters, and asked that the hall be cleared. No move was made.

John Reed, prominent in the councils of the Left, tried to brush past Julius Gerber of New York, who was aiding in the seating arrangements. Gerber demanded that Reed get an admission card, and they got into a brief tussle, in which several other Left Wingers thought they would aid Reed.

Lurid Stories Sent Out.

This was the only disorder that occurred, despite the lurid stories sent out by the press associations. Gerber, seeing that an attempt was being made to rush the convention, determined to clear the hall. A squad of policemen had been detailed to the convention by headquarters, and he asked them to get everybody out, which they did, without difficulty or violence.

Telling the convention about it later, Germer stated that as the Left Wingers were being ushered out one of them turned to him and said, "This is just what we wanted. It will make us 10,000 members."

Germer, in his opening address, reviewed briefly the schism in the party. He denounced the injection of personalities, "slander and conspiracies" in the party's internal controversies, and pointed out that the party, while giving full support and sympathy to the revolutionary workers of Russia, Hungary, Germany, and all other countries, could not adopt in toto their methods.

"We readily distinguish between conditions in Russia and those prevailing here," he said. "There is a decided difference in political and economic conditions. And, while we have the same goal as have our comrades of Europe, our methods in view of the conditions under which we must apply them, will have to be different."

Stedman Named Chairman.

One hundred and fifty-five names of uncontested delegates were read, and with few exceptions, all responded. In the first balloting, Stedman won over Joseph M. Coldwell of Rhode Island, by 88 to 37, for chairman of the day.

In a clear, forceful speech, Stedman rapidly drew a picture of what has happened to the Socialist Party in the United States during and since the war period. The mere fact that so many of its prominent figures are either in prison, or have been in prison, or are under sentence, for violation of repressive war measures, was proof of the party's uncompromising attitude, Stedman pointed out.

"No olive branch has been held out to Scheidemann or Ebert. There was no compromise. When we proposed to send delegates to a European conference they were sent to participate only where the Soviets of Russia and Hungary, and the Spartacans of Germany could sit.

"After the Brest-Litovsk treaty and the German invasion of Russia, the Executive Committee was asked to call a convention to redraft the St. Louis platform. We consciously delayed calling a convention at that time. We knew that between the Tsar of Russia and the Soviets, American capitalism would line up with the Tsar. And soon this thing came, and became clear to all."

Here Stedman paid his respects to the ultraradicals of today, who at that time were "caught by the magic phrases of the distinguished imperialist scholar in the White House."

"When the history of our party in this period is written by tranquil minds, those who read it will read it with respect and honor for the workers of the United States, who for two and a half years had their liberty shattered into fragments, and still held aloft all the time the burning light of revolutionary Socialism."

Gerber Elected Secretary.

Julius Gerber of New York was elected permanent secretary of the convention; Algernon Lee, vice chairman, and James B. Sheahan of Albany, sergeant-at-arms. The rules and order of business were gone over very thoroughly. Most of the committees were raised in number, from 7 to 11, and in one case, that of the Committee on Resolutions and Foreign Relations, from 7 to 15.

The motion of J. Louis Engdahl of Cook County, Illinois, that the nomination of Presidential candidates for 1920 be made part of the business of the convention, was ruled out by the chairman, and Engdahl promptly appealed.

Engdahl, in stating his case, declared that the expense of holding a convention might preclude the holding of another until after the 1920 [campaign] was half over; that the party would gain strength through having its national ticket actually named, and particularly that there was no division of opinion as to the candidate for President.

“Debs” — a storm of applause greeted the name. “Is there any doubt that you want him?”

Engdahl demanded.

Stedman’s ruling was supported, however, after he had given his position. He pointed out that the call to the convention said nothing of nominations of Presidential candidates, the delegates had not been elected for the purpose of nominating and were totally uninstructed on the matter.

He took occasion to emphasize his own personal fidelity to Debs, and resented the idea that by not nominating Debs the convention was in any way expressing lack of confidence in Debs or voting unfavorably on his ultimate nomination.

While the chair was sustained by a substantial majority, there is a strong feeling among some delegates that the action was a mistake. It is pointed out that the Communist Party, whose convention is scheduled to open Monday [Sept. 1, 1920], is exceedingly likely to nominate Debs immediately, which would put the Socialist Party in the position of trailing alone behind the Communists. Besides, it would create an exceedingly embarrassing situation for Debs, the more so, as he cannot be fully informed of the party’s situation.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.

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