
“Left Wing” Attempt to Capture Convention Hall Proves Failure

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(Special to *The Call*.)

CHICAGO, Aug. 30 [1919].— The first skirmish between the Lefts and the Socialist Party took place at Machinists’ Hall this morning, an hour before the Emergency Convention opened. The general staff of the Lefts had arranged a maneuver whereby they would either get physical control of the hall or they would gain the stage as “revolutionary martyrs” with the Chicago police and the Socialist Party as partners in oppression.

Led by John Reed and a picked company of freelancers, some 50 men and women occupied Machinists’ Hall auditorium, disporting themselves in the delegates’ seats without benefit of credentials. When, half an hour later, Adolph Germer, National Secretary of the Socialist Party, and his staff arrived to open the convention, they were confronted with the choice of either surrendering the hall to the Lefts or of insisting on their right to the auditorium.

Germer felt that the problem rested with the management of the hall, and the management, recognizing the Socialist Party as entitled to what they had contracted for, asked the intruders to get out. The Lefts refused, whereupon the management obliged the Lefts by letting them pose as they planned and called in two corpulent policemen. With smiles of triumph wreathing their faces, the Lefts then went into caucus to capitalize their martyrdom. The result of the caucus, presided over by John Reed, was the following statement addressed to the delegates of the Emergency Convention:

We address you to inform you of occurrences this morning which every revolutionary Socialist on the floor of this convention will protest against.

Delegations from Illinois, Minnesota, Washington, Oregon, Ohio, Nebraska, California, and other states entered the convention floor and took their seats in readiness

for the opening of the convention.

At nearly 10 o’clock, Gerber of New York and Goebel of New Jersey, who were at the door and attempted to refuse the above-named delegates admission, called the police and these delegations were ejected from the hall by police power, many of them being roughly handled.

This despicable act must be added to the many others of which the reactionary officialdom of the Socialist Party is guilty. Not satisfied with wrecking the party, expelling more than half of the membership, it now proceeds to deny a half of the half still in the party representation at this convention. And it does this by calling upon the police for assistance.

A denial will be made that the police were called upon. We can produce evidence that Gerber ordered the police to expel the comrades from the hall, and he also remarked that if they did not move fast enough to treat ‘em rough.

Wonder is Expressed.

“We wonder,” it continued, “how many delegates upon the floor of this convention will stand for such procedure.”

We wonder how many delegates upon the floor of this convention will silently comply with the acts of a reactionary officialdom in attempting to control this convention by denying seats to delegates. This denial is autocratic in the extreme, for the delegates upon the floor of this convention have not ordered such action and have had no chance to express themselves as to whether the delegations from these many states shall be denied their rightful privileges.

There is but one thing you can do, comrade delegates; that is to make as your first command upon the calling of the convention to order that all delegates elected to attend this convention be seated and that the Credentials Committee decided what contests there may be. Certainly no one man or a half dozen men shall decide this for you preliminary to the opening of the convention.

We address you again on the important matters which it becomes your duty to act upon. To us your duty seems clear. Demand that all delegates be seated in this preliminary convention until you have an opportunity to determine who are the rightful delegates to this convention.

**National Executive Committee,
Socialist Party.**

The signing of the statement, "National Executive Committee, Socialist Party," is characteristic. Ask the Lefts as to whom they mean by the "National Executive Committee" and they answer, "Fraina, Ruthenberg, Reed, Lindgren," and the others the Left Wing had declared to be in charge of the Socialist Party. But that declaration was made 3 weeks ago; and 3 weeks in the Left Wing movement is a cycle. Since then all the members of the so-called "National Executive Committee, Socialist Party" have resigned, some to join the Communist Party about to form, others for temperamental reasons of their own.

Some Good Camouflage.

But it was good camouflage to sign the statement thus; so the camouflage corps will be set to work.

The Left Wing have established themselves in the left wing of the Machinists' Hall, modestly placarding that part of the building as "headquarters of the Socialist Party." But it would be hard to placard them with less than at least three different designations. For it is a badly dislocated wing. There has been a split for every week since the launching of the Left Wing as an organized group. At the national conference in New York [June 21-24, 1919] the expelled Michigan Socialists bolted from the conference because their demand that a Communist Party be launched at once was turned down. Several hours later the foreign language federations broke away because they felt that in refusing to give them power proportionate to their numbers the "majority" had trampled ruthlessly on the proletariat's right to democratic participation. The remaining delegates elected a National Council, which was to pilot the Left Wing with *The Revolutionary Age* as official organ and Louis C. Fraina as editor-in-chief; John Reed and Eadmonn MacAlpine as associate editors; and Benjamin Gitlow as business manager.

Split Over Two Issues.

Since then the National Council has split over two issues. To the outside world the Lefts declare that there is but one issue, a temporary one, dividing the various fragments among them, the question as to whether the Lefts are to organize a Communist Party at once, or to wait for the outcome of the Emergency

Convention of the Socialist Party. But among themselves they admit that it is the foreign language federations and the question of their control which is the rock on which they split. Being in the majority in the Left movement, the foreign language federations are in position to dominate the Communist Party. John Reed and Benjamin Gitlow are leaders in the section which considers that a political party appealing to the workers of this country, yet dominated by foreign language federations, is an absurdity.

Meanwhile the foreign language federations joined the Michigan section in a call for the formation of the Communist Party. By this tactical advantage they were enabled to win over to them most of the National Council of the Left Wing, with the exception of John Reed, Benjamin Gitlow, A. Wagenknecht, Jim Larkin, and Eadmonn MacAlpine. Louis C. Fraina, after waiting to see which way the cat would jump, joined with the majority. The result was that John Reed and Benjamin Gitlow found themselves literally locked out of office, three new Yale locks on the door of the office of *The Revolutionary Age* confronting them one day.

Sorely Confused Left.

It is a sorely confused Left Wing that is hovering in Machinists' Hall today. With the Michigan crowd and the foreign language federations sounding a call to their Communist Party headquarters at 1221 Blue Island Avenue; with one caucus presided over by John Reed excluding many of the most prominent Left Wingers because they are known to be opposed to Reed and Gitlow; and with the Socialist Party convention in full control of its own convention, there is a distressed look in the eyes of the restless crowd in the left wing of Machinists' Hall.

John Reed, always picturesque in his Norfolk-cut suit and hatless; Rose Pastor Stokes, in neat tailor-made blue; Maximilian Cohen, crisp and cool in his Palm Beach suit of light tan; Louis C. Fraina, with his neatly trimmed Van Dyke beard; Max Eastman, sunburned and debonair in blue serge — these are the leaders in this offshoot of the "revolutionary proletariat" as against the "bourgeois" Socialist Party. Today they are still hovering about Machinists' Hall. But they have read the signs and the event on which they

had so pathetically based their hope; the Emergency Convention has from its first hours run so emphatically against them that aside from their scant victory of martyrdom at the hands of two Chicago policemen they are momentarily losing hope of escaping the humiliation of going hat in hand Monday morning [Sept. 1, 1919] to the already formed Communist Party to beg admission.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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