## **The State Convention** [events of February 26-28, 1916]

## by Alex Georgian

Unsigned in *New Times* [Minneapolis], v. 6, no. 20 (March 11, 1916), pg. 4. Editor of *New Times* was Alexis E. Georgian.

The state Socialist convention of 1916 was on the whole one of the most satisfactory that has ever been held in Minnesota.

One of its best features as compared with past conventions was that the time was not consumed by repeated orations by the same person, by personal squabbles, or by sidetracking the question.

Conspiratory tactics seemed largely eliminated, by which we mean that the convention program was not, at least as far as could be seen, framed up in advance by the administrative clique and steam rollered through by buttonholing delegates and misinforming them on the question at issue.

The rank and file took a larger part in the discussions than ever before. Everything was discussed on its merits and passed on its merits.

The chairman, T.E. Latimer, very carefully and wisely for himself, steered the convention clear of any criticism of the State Executive Board which was practically elected by himself, since a slate was prepared under his advice by the Finnish comrades connected with the daily paper *Sosialisti* and published in that paper with the result that the slate was elected to a man.<sup>†</sup>

An instant in the discussion that indicates a danger to which the party may be subject especially in the future occurred in connection with the debate on the proposition to demand in our platform the taxation of all church properties. This feature, which even the capitalist press of Duluth declared to be one of the most radical, was opposed by our Finnish revolutionists because they feared that under such a law their college at Smithville would be taxed also.

The property god is still worshipped, it seems, even among our revolutionists. This incident reminds us of what Comrade Alexandra Kollontay said on her recent tour was one of the causes for the conservative stand taken by the German Socialists on the war. They were, she said, afraid that their expensive printing plants and beautiful halls and labor temples would be confiscated by the government in case they waged an active opposition to the war.

Probably the most important work of the convention was the settlement of the difficulties that had arisen in the state as a result of the split in the Finnish Federation. In a number of towns where the [radical] Finnish local had been expelled from the [moderate]

†- Sosialisti was the controversial Left Wing Finnish newspaper established in 1914 in response to the Finnish daily *Työmies* falling under control of the moderate faction in the federation. The main issue of disagreement was the relationship of the Finnish Socialists to the Industrial Workers of the World, with the Left Wingers seeking to work closely with the syndicalist union as part of their revolutionary socialist vision while the moderates viewed the anti-political and sabotage-friendly IWW as anathema. The moderates, who controlled the administration of the Finnish Socialist Federation, made the support of — or subscription to — the pro-syndicalist daily *Sosialisti* a party crime, subject to expulsion. A two-year battle erupted, pitting the Left Wing Finns of the Central District (of which Minnesota was an important part) against the moderates of the Federation's Eastern District. As is revealed by this article, in Minnesota the Left Wingers held the upper hand, their charters issued by the Minnesota State Executive Board not being rescinded despite the National Executive Committee of the SPA's support of the moderates. Indeed, Georgian states here that the composition of the SEB controlled by the Left Wingers themselves, with the result that Finns loyal to the moderate Federation leaders were effectively blocked from Minnesota charters. The 1916 Minnesota State Convention marked the liquidation of the controversy, with the moderate Finns gaining the right to admission to the state party and the Left Wingers gaining legitimacy, an arrangement apparently brokered by *Sosialisti* editor Leo Laukki. *Sosialisti* discontinued publication on December 19, 1916, with *Työmies* emerging as a Left Wing publication.

Federation, but still held its charter from the state organization, thee were members of the local who desired to be affiliated with the federation and who, therefore, requested that another charter be granted to them. This the State Executive Board refused to do even thought the state constitution provides that 5 members may form a local. By so doing they were keeping out of the party the 472 signers of the petition for charters. The convention ruled that the state constitution should be upheld and the charters granted.

The report of the woman's organizer shows that the money paid out for this purpose is practically thrown away. Much more effective would be a woman employed upon the same basis as other organizers to work especially among the women. It could just as well be handled by the State Secretary, and the money applied toward paying the stenographer in the State Office a living wage, which is now below the minimum fixed by the minimum wage commission.

While the convention was better than the previous ones, it was still far from satisfactory. This was chiefly due to the fact that there were too many important questions that had to be disposed of in too short a time.

For example, while everyone admits in theory that the Socialist press is of the most vital importance to the movement, in practice it receives less attention and support than almost anything else. The convention was no exception. The party press question was disposed of in about 15 minutes by changing the monthly bulletin to a weekly, for which purpose the dues were increased to 3 cents [per month]. This is to be left in control of the State Secretary and State Executive Board. Our past experience with the *Minnesota Socialist* where the board of directors were at the same time members of the Executive Board or members of the same clique, has shown us that the officials were more concerned to use the party paper as their own mouthpiece and to keep themselves in office than for the correct information and benefit of the party.

A party press to be a success and of benefit to the party must be at the service of the rank and file for the free and impartial discussion of party questions. Until some method has been carefully worked out by which this can be obtained, a party paper will work to the detriment of the party rather than to its success.

In a 2-day or 3-day convention there is not time for the committees to properly work out the matters referred to them, nor for the convention to properly consider the various proposals laid before it.

As a remedy for this we believe it would work to the benefit of the party if these important committees would be elected beforehand and all resolutions, constitutional amendments, and platform proposals should be drawn up by the locals and published at least 3 months before the convention in the party bulletin, after which they should be referred by the State Secretary to the proper committee.

Such a method would acquaint the rank and file with the matters that would come up at the convention and would permit them to discuss the measures and instruct their delegates so that the convention in addition to being more effective would be more democratic as they would more nearly reflect the opinion of the rank and file.

Edited by Tim Davenport. Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2009. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.