International Socialist Delegates

by Louis Fraina †

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In answer to the call of Camille Huysmans for an International Socialist Congress to be convened at Lausanne, Switzerland, the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party of America announces that it has appointed Algernon Lee, James Oneal, and John M. Work as delegates. The statement published in the New York Call goes on to say that on a referendum vote taken over a year ago, when the Stockholm Conference was to be held, Morris Hillquit, Victor Berger, and Algernon Lee were elected to attend that body and intimates that the appointment of the 3 men named as the Lausanne delegates was governed by the vote cast on the former occasion, Hillquit being unable to go to Europe owing to ill health which has held him confined for some months past and Berger being at the present moment standing trial under the Espionage Act.

As a matter of fact the 3 men elected to attend the Stockholm Conference were Hillquit, George Kirkpatrick, and Berger. None of the present appointees were elected, nor did any of them even run fourth, that position being taken by Scott Nearing. But even if they had all been elected to attend the Stockholm Conference it is the meanest kind of subterfuge to presume that such an election would give them any claim to attend a Congress called under altogether different circumstances and facing entirely new problems. In the lapse of time between the attempt to convene the Stockholm Conference and the present day much that vitally affects the Socialist movement of the world has happened, and it is a preposterous supposition that because under one set of circumstances a man is elected he is the choice of the electorate for all time.

The National Executive Committee advances the argument in defense of its action that the time set for the opening of the congress is so short that it has no time to appeal to the membership. This is merely paltering. The National Executive Committee has been approached by various branches and locals of the party to call an Emergency National Convention in order to give the membership an opportunity of expressing their will on all the matters arising out of the present crisis through which the world is passing, and particularly to deal with the convocation of an International Socialist Congress. However, the National Executive Committee has not been able to meet since the armistice was signed. They have put off meeting time and again on various paltry excuses and when the call came for an International Socialist Convention they selected delegates by telegram.

The constitution of the Socialist Party provides for the election of delegates to International Socialist Conventions, it provides several ways in

†- Attributed to Editor Louis Fraina based on style. Fraina was at the time in Essex Co. Jail, Newark, NJ, serving a 30 sentence for remarks made to a meeting of Conscientious Objectors early in the war. Fraina had appealed the case and the decision went against him, forcing him to turn himself in on January 7, 1919. As Fraina was able to write a lengthy front page article for the February 1, 1919 edition from jail, there is no reason to think that he was prevented by his incarceration from completing this editorial as well.
which they may be elected, but it does not pro-
vide that the National Executive Committee shall
appoint delegates. The appointment of the present
men in contrary to the constitution, it is arbitrary
and it is illegal. It makes no difference whether
the choice is a wise one or not, the action is illegal.
The Socialist Party has insisted that the delegates
of the United States government to the Peace Con-
ference should be appointed by a referendum vote
of the people but in the appointment of Socialist
delegates the National Executive Committee ig-
nores the membership of the party.

Algernon Lee, one of the appointees, is the
leader of the Socialist group in the New York City
Board of Aldermen and his actions and those of
his colleagues in that body have not found favor
with a considerable section of the membership of
the party in New York. On one occasion 27
branches of Local New York voted to censure their
actions, 2 advocated the withdrawal of the group
form the board of Aldermen, and only 2 or 3 voted
to uphold the actions of the Socialist Aldermen.
At the present moment there is a movement to
withdraw them form the Board. In view of these
facts Lee’s chances of election as one of the del-
egates to represent the Socialist Party of America
in Europe are at least debatable and his appoint-
ment is directly contrary to Socialist practices.

But before electing delegates the American
Socialist Party has first to decide whether or not it
will participate in a conference called by social
patriots of the type of Huysmans. According to
the press the Bolsheviki have refused to partici-
pate in the congress on the grounds that it is called
by reactionary Socialists and will not be represent-
tive of the revolutionary Socialism that is sweep-
ing triumphantly over Europe. If the revolution-
ary sections of the Socialist movement repudiate
this conference then the membership of the Ameri-
can Socialist Party must also refuse to participate
or else align itself with the reactionaries who ac-
cepted and condoned the war.

The only way in which American Socialism
can arrive at a decision that will reflect the wishes
of the membership is through an Emergency Na-
tional Convention. The National Executive Com-
mittee is empowered to call such a convention and
the membership of the party should insist that it
act without a moment’s delay.