

---

# Why the Foreign Language Federations Were Suspended.

by David P. Berenberg

Unsigned reportage in *The Socialist* [New York], v. 1, no. 6 (June 11, 1919), pg. 5.  
Author is presumed to be the publication's editor, David P. Berenberg.

*The Socialist* reprints below the charges upon which seven language federations were suspended by the National Executive Committee at its recent session in Chicago. In reading these charges it must be remembered that the federations were not suspended because they held to views in conflict with the party. The Italian and Scandinavian translators [Translator-Secretaries] stated to the committee that they believed a majority of their members endorsed the so-called "Left Wing" program. Yet these two federations were not suspended. They had not indulged in the corrupt practices the others did in the referendums and had not endorsed the "Left Wing" organization within the organization.

Nor is the action suspending the seven federations final. They are suspended pending an investigation by a special committee of four, no one of which is a member of the National [Executive] Committee. This committee is to investigate all the evidence, giving the accused federations an opportunity to defend themselves against the charges. The special committee will then report its findings to the special National Convention called to meet in Chicago August 30. This convention, composed of delegates from all parts of the country, will pass final judgment on the whole proceedings.

In the meantime the accused federations and their allies, the "Left Wing," will try to get the action of the National Executive Committee submitted to a referendum. Within 24 hours after the action was taken, such a request was received from Cleveland. They want action taken by the party members without the latter being able to consult the evidence through their delegates in the convention. On the face of it this is a matter that cannot be settled by a referendum.

Only a convention can settle it. For that reason a referendum should be opposed wherever it is suggested. Only parties who feel guilty of charges under such circumstances would demand a verdict without the party as a whole having an opportunity to consult the evidence in the case. The charges are as follows:

"Whereas, an organization was recently formed within the Socialist Party styling itself the 'Left Wing' Section of the Socialist Party and practically duplicating the entire Party machinery within the local, state, and nation, even to the extent of calling a National Convention; and,

"Whereas, this organization adopted a program ranging in extremes from the immediate abolition of **all** social reform planks to the safeguarding of small investors and the protection of small owners of stock, and for the conquest of power through mass action in contradistinction to political action, now carried on by the Socialist Party of America; thus, showing a transplantation in detail of methods used by the comrades in the second Russian Revolution, with an utter disregard for the difference of conditions in this country; and,

"Whereas, members and locals of the self-styled 'Left Wing' Section have adopted the most undemocratic and unscrupulous methods, even to shutting off discussion of their program seriatim at local conventions of the party, assuming that decisions adopted by the so-called 'Left Wing' organization are binding upon the membership of the party; and

"Whereas, the activities of the so-called 'Left Wing' organizations reached the point where the vote on party officials and delegates to the International Congress was tampered with to the extent of voting *en*

*bloc* and other methods used by the corrupt political parties of the capitalist class; and

“Whereas, the party constitution provides ample machinery for the modification of tactics and policies by the medium of discussion and decisions within the branches and locals, by the initiation of referenda, and by instructions to delegates to conventions; and

“Whereas, documentary evidence before the committee consisting of translations from language papers, statements of some Translator-Secretaries, and articles in the so-called ‘Left Wing’ Press reveal repeated defiance of party decisions in conventions and referendums, and

“Whereas, reports of the Translator-Secretaries of the Russian, Lithuanian, Lettish [Latvian], Ukrainian, and South Slavic Federations show an abnormal increase of membership in recent months, indicating an attempt to colonize for the purpose of capturing the party by sheer force of numbers and not by intelligent discussion, and

“Whereas, the ‘Left Wing’ endorsed by these Federations has violated Section 1 of Article 2 of the National Constitution,† by making possession of a white card of the ‘Left Wing’ the test of loyalty to the

Socialist Party, thus outlawing the red card itself, and,

“Whereas, those Federations in their joint letters to the National Executive Committee, practically repudiate Section 5(a) of Article 12 of the National Constitution‡ and even insist that the National Executive Committee sustain them in such repudiation, and

“Whereas, these Federations have violated the spirit and intent of Section 2 of Article 12,§ which provides that the duty of Translator-Secretaries shall be ‘to serve as a medium of communication’ between their federations and the Party, by using their official positions to dictate the policies and tactics of the party in addition to their control of their federations, and

“Whereas the Russian, Lithuanian, Lettish, Ukrainian, South Slavic, Polish, and Hungarian Federations either in whole or in part joined the so-called ‘Left Wing’ and declared in a communication to the National Executive Committee that they will ‘brook no opposition to the stand they have taken,’ thus violating Section 3 Article 10, of the National Constitution,\* which says that ‘no state or local organization shall, under any circumstances, fuse, combine, or compromise with any other political party or organization;’

†- Article 2 (Membership), Section 1: “Every person, resident of the United States of the age of eighteen years and upward, without discrimination to sex, race, color, or creed, who has severed his connection with all other political parties and political organizations, and subscribes to the principles of the Socialist Party, including political action and unrestricted political rights for both sexes, shall be eligible to membership in the party.”

‡- Article 12 (Foreign Speaking Federations), Section 5(a): “Branches of Language Federations shall be an integral part of the county and state organizations, and must in all cases work in harmony with the constitution and platform of the state and county organizations of the Socialist Party.

Language branches not affiliated with a federation of their respective language shall work in harmony with such federation, restricting their work within the territorial jurisdiction of such branches. In no case, however, shall such branches indulge in or permit their members to carry on work against the interests of the federation. Federations shall not be permitted to organize additional branches not affiliated with them, except with the consent of the state organizations. The charter of any language branch not affiliated with a federation that condones or conducts work aiming at the destruction of a federation shall be revoked by the state organization in accordance with the method of procedure provided by the constitution of the state organization. When the charter of such branch is revoked, such of its members who will agree to refrain from similar objectionable work in the future shall be organized in a new branch. But no member of a branch, the charter of which has been revoked for the offense mentioned above, shall be denied admission to the new branch if a statement is signed obligating himself to work in harmony of the provisions of the section.”

§- Article 12 (Foreign Speaking Federations), Section 2: “Such National Language Federation shall have the right to elect an officer known as Translator-Secretary, who shall be conversant with his own language as well as the English language, and whose duty it shall be to serve as a medium of communication between his federation and the national organization of the Socialist Party.”

\*- Article 10 (State Organizations), Section 3: “(a) The platform of the Socialist Party shall be the supreme declaration of the party, and all state and municipal platforms shall conform thereto. No state or local organization shall under any circumstances fuse, combine, or compromise with any other political party or organization, or refrain from making nominations, in order to favor the candidate of such other organizations, nor shall any candidate of the Socialist Party accept any nomination or endorsement from any other party or political organization.

(b) No member of the Socialist Party shall, under any circumstances, vote in any political election for any candidate other than Socialist Party members nominated, endorsed, or recommended as candidates by the Socialist Party, or advocate voting for them. To do so will constitute party treason and result in expulsion from the party.

“Therefore, be it resolved, by the National Executive Committee, that the foregoing recital of conditions and the violations of the letter, spirit, and intent of the party constitution, constitute a grave situation which the party cannot tolerate; that to countenance these flagrant violations would mean to betray the confidence of the party membership and deliver the party organization to a self-constituted group that is waging war against the Socialist Party and the policies of the party formulated in conventions and endorsed by referendums.

“Be it further resolved, that for the violations of the party constitution mentioned above, the National Executive Committee, fully conscious of its grave responsibility in the matter, herewith suspends the Russian, Lettish, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Hungarian, South Slavic, and Polish Federations, together with such privileges as affiliation with the party give them.

“Be it further resolved, that this decision, together with the documentary and other evidence upon which it is based, be transmitted to the special National Convention and that the secretaries of the federations affected be accorded full opportunity to present their case to the Convention.

“Be it further resolved, that those members of the above-mentioned federations who are not in agreement with the defiant policies of their federations, be welcomed as members of the party by the locals and branches of the several states.”

*Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.*

*Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2005. • Free reproduction permitted.*