
“Left Wing” Convention is as Secret as Paris Conference:

Next Move of Faction Will be Attempt to Capture Socialist Party’s Emergency Convention in August, says James ONeal.

by James ONeal

Published in *The Milwaukee Leader*, v. 8, no. 186 (July 15, 1919), pg. 5.

The National Conference of the “Left Wing” recently held in New York was as secret as the one held by the diplomats in Paris. Probably the “rank and file” were not considered as being important enough to permit them to know what the “dictatorship of the proletariat” was doing. Little information was given out and only fragmentary items are appearing in the “Left Wing” organs. Enough is known, however, to make it interesting reading for members of the Socialist Party.

The *Socialist News* of Cleveland, issue of June 28, has a brief but partial account and from this we gather that the very first national gathering of the “lefts” brought them in conflict with the suspended language federations. The latter tried to do the very thing they tried to do in the party and the “lefts” became very much concerned about it. The Central Executive Committee of the foreign language federations presented a claim for the seating of 13 delegates and this provoked a “sharp division.” The federations were already represented by delegates elected direct in which elections they participated. The Central Executive Committee pressed its claim and the duplicate delegates were seated.

• • • • •

The matter again came up when it came to the election of a National Council of 9. The *News* says:

The question of how the National Council should be determined precipitated another bitter struggle. It was the contention of the foreign language federations that since they constituted the bulk of the “Left Wing,” in addition to 9 members provided for by the committee’s report, each foreign language federation should have the right to elect

one member who should have the full power of membership. This proposal would have given the foreign language federations control of the committee.

• • • • •

In other words, the “lefts” were up against the same proposition the party has faced. They voted the proposal down. They had to or else turn their movement over to the foreign language federations. The struggle, however, is not over, considering this first one is admitted to have been a “bitter” one. The “lefts” are willing to use these federations to “capture” the party, but after using them for this purpose, they want to retain control themselves. But this is a difficult job as the federations represent “the bulk of the ‘Left Wing’” as they contended in the conference.

The *News’* report is significant in the use of the words “capture,” “control,” and “conquest” with reference to the Socialist Party. The report conveys, by the use of these words, that this conference is determined to conquer the party not to win the membership to any changes which the “lefts” think worthwhile. It “was the one question which constantly projected itself into the proceedings,” according to the report of the *News*.

• • • • •

Some delegates were not satisfied that they can “capture” the party organization and the following resolution was introduced:

Resolved, That the “Left Wing” conference immediately sever all connections with the Socialist Party of the United States and proceed at once with the work of organizing a

new party.

After a long debate this resolution was defeated by a vote of 38 for and 55 against, "thereby putting the convention on record as favoring continuance of the struggle for the conquest of the Socialist Party until the Emergency National Convention," to quote the *News*. It reads like a report of a Tammany meeting, this desire for the "conquest" of the organization.

But the "lefts" also arranged so that they can immediately constitute themselves as another party if they fail to "capture" the party in August. The National Council is authorized to elect a National Secretary and to issue dues stamps to the faithful. Furthermore, if they do not "capture" the Emergency National Convention in August and reinstate the suspended federations, then the National Council "shall proceed with the work of organizing the Communist Party," again quoting the *News*.

• • • • •

In other words, unless the Socialist Party is willing to submit to the dictatorship of the "Left Wing," the latter is prepared to organize its motley elements into another political party. The split, in other words, is here and the "lefts" have made doubly sure of it. It is just as well that they have, as one year of a Communist Party that talks of the "conquest of the bourgeois state by the revolutionary mass action of the proletariat" cannot live in this country as a political organization of the working class. It will be driven underground. It cannot remain on the ballot in any state as soon as this program becomes generally known. It must become a secret society.

Unofficial reports, however, have it that the "lefts" considerably modified their program at this conference. It is more "moderate" than the queer statements they have been printing. If this proves true it means that they have recognized the correctness of the criticism made by Socialist Party members. In the east they presented their manifesto as a holy document, insisting that the party should not change a single word of it when it was forced upon some party meetings.

Now the holy document has been modified, toned down, and made rather "moderate," if reports are true. If they prove true the "left wing" has profited by the criticisms made by comrades who refused to accept the manifesto.

• • • • •

But all was not harmony at this conference, as we have shown. Three divisions appeared in the conference. The Michigan crowd and the Russian delegates walked out on one occasion. Michigan is determined to organize the Communist Party no matter what occurs at the emergency convention. Some very hot words were hurled at each other by various delegates and the tension became strained to the breaking point a number of times. "Counterrevolutionist" and other epithets were used liberally by the simon pure "revolutionists." The conference confirms what Socialists have said of the "Left Wing," that the only thing that keeps the "lefts" together is their common hatred of the Socialist Party. Differences for the time being are reconciled in the common aim in trying to "capture" the emergency convention. After that, they will be thrown upon their own resources and they can be relied upon to tear each other to pieces.

• • • • •

One delegate, who attended with a sincere belief that the "Left Wing" is necessary, left the convention in gloom. He was heard to express the opinion that men with the temperaments and bellicose views of the delegates to this conference could never organize anything better than a perpetual quarreling group. He was pessimistic and uncertain what his course would be.

The "Left Wing" has had its first national gathering. Its future may be surmised from the stormy session which this first gathering of the clans provoked. Their next move is to "capture" the emergency convention of the Socialist Party. Whether they do or not, they have insured a split in the Socialist Party.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2006. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.