
The National Convention

by Ludwig Lore

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When the holding of a National Convention was first proposed, the project was received with obvious hesitation by the party authorities, coming as it did from that element of the movement which felt the need of a reorientation in party tactics and methods with which to meet a new world. In every country of Europe the Socialist movement had been split asunder, everywhere Left Wing Communists and Right Wing opportunists had become bitter antagonists. In Italy and Norway alone it has been possible to save the unity of the party because these parties as a whole adopted the program and methods of the Communist movement.

At that time it still seemed possible to follow the example of our Italian and Norwegian comrades in this country. The party membership was undoubtedly in sympathy with the revolutionary movement in Europe. The enthusiastic support they gave to the Bolshevik movement in Russia, to the Spartacists in Germany, and to the Hungarian Communists seemed to prove that the rank and file was ready to support a radical departure from the methods that have hitherto prevailed in the American Socialist Party. Sentiment in the West was and is undoubtedly with the Communists, and in the East, too, whole states and strong local organizations are strongly in favor of new methods.

Under the circumstances the so-called "Left Wingers" were perfectly justified in organizing their forces for a campaign of intensive agitation within the party. That the party membership was

divided on the question of methods of propaganda and tactics was apparent. But the division was so obviously in favor of the Left that the only possibility of safeguarding the unity of the movement lay in the adoption of a Communist program of action, emphasizing the allegiance of the American party not only to the revolutionary groups in Europe, but to the principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat upon which these groups are fundamentally organized.

Apparently the National Executive Committee entertained the same conviction. Why, otherwise, should it expel the state organizations of Massachusetts, Ohio, Michigan, and Pennsylvania for Left Wing sympathies? Why, otherwise, should it suspend entire language federations for the same reason? Why should the State Executive Committee of New York, with the same disregard of constitutional forms, suspend most of the largest locals of the state and proceed with their reorganization long before a referendum of the party membership was finally taken? Why, otherwise, was the referendum on the expulsion of these locals postponed until even their possible readmission by the handful of members that remained in the state was no longer dangerous to the convention? Why, otherwise, should the National Executive Committee allow to the reorganized locals, with but a small fraction of the original membership, the right to elect the full quota of delegates allowed to these locals before their reorganization? (In Kings County [New York] the reorganized local branches, of about 500 members, will send a del-

egation of 6 to the national convention, a delegation that requires a membership of 3,000). Surely our party leaders would not have used practices of such extremely questionable character had they felt confident of their power to control the convention.

Under these circumstance the outcome of the convention can hardly be doubtful. Packed as it will be by representatives from “reorganized” states and locals who will be little more than mouthpieces of the powers that be in the Socialist Party, we doubt whether even the strong revolutionary element that will come from the West and from some states in the East will be numerically sufficiently strong to win out over their Right Wing opponents.

The parting of the ways has come. And it has come because the brutal violation of the party autocracy of all who differed with them has left no other choice.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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