
The Socialist Party Convention: An Editorial in the *New York Call*, August 27, 1919.

by James Oneal

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Attributed to *Call* editorial writer James Oneal.

The meeting of the Socialist Party in national convention in Chicago this week is of great importance to the Socialist movement of the United States. It is certain that the convention will simply be a formal recognition of a schism within the organization which has been developed by skilled propagandists. Yet it would be idle to assume that propaganda alone is responsible. All movements and all institutions of the modern world have been profoundly affected by the war and what has followed the war. The Socialist movement can no more be immune from the titanic forces that have shaken the world than any other movement.

However, the fact that the Socialist movement in this country also is shaken by an internal schism does not of itself indicate that the insurgent groups represent sound politics. That remains to be proven. There has been two tendencies within the movement in all countries, one an emotional and partly hysterical reaction to the war, the other a cool and calculated comprehension of the need of a new orientation. Just as at the beginning of the war a hysterical type developed and separated from the movement, so the end of the war brings with it a similar type determined on the same course.

This type is composed of a number of groups by no means harmonious. Its internal dissensions the moment the groups were thrown together upon their own resources are evidence of that.

Within a few weeks after their first national conference they were “split” into two factions, and there were three “National Secretaries.” A temporary truce has been formed upon the basis of organizing a party of their own without any further activity within the Socialist Party. This will again throw them together, and in the absence of the one tie that held the groups together, a common antagonism to the Socialist Party, it is fairly certain that they will not maintain unity for any long period. The reason for this is the multiplicity of views they must try to reconcile, and these views diverge so much that permanent reconciliation is practically hopeless.

This is the status of affairs that faces the party when it meets in convention Saturday [Aug. 30, 1919]. The Socialist Party delegates will meet after a little more than two years of history, which have tried it by many tests. It courageously faced the issues that were to come from the plunge of the nation into the bloody maelstrom abroad. It took its stand in a world gone mad with lust and hate and bent upon destruction. It never surrendered its reason, though many of its members paid a heavy price for their sanity. Many were mobbed, organizations were broken up by “patriots,” publications were killed by the censor, others have dragged out a miserable existence, and some of its most prominent members are serving long terms in the penitentiaries. All this is only part of the

price paid by the Socialist Party for its refusal to be chained to the chariot of the imperialists and exploiters.

The delegates can meet in convention with a consciousness that the organization has been tried by coercion, terror, and imprisonment. Here and there were minor disagreements. A very small, honest, and sincere minority urged a modification of the party's position during the war, but, receiving no encouragement, they held their Socialist solidarity of more importance than the fleeting applause they would have received from the enemy if they had deserted. The course of the party has been magnificently vindicated by the peace treaty and the reactionary character of the Entente in Europe and its intervention in Russia. No movement in all history ever so accurately forecast results as the Socialist Party did in its declarations during the period of the war. Based upon a philosophy of history that is hated by all ruling classes, this philosophy is verified by its most malignant opponents and betrayers.

The Chicago convention undoubtedly will formulate changes in party program and policy in keeping with the great events of the past few years. But we also can rely upon it to avoid hysteria and emotion in formulating them, to keep in mind the material world around us, not to overestimate possibilities, and to adjust itself to changing conditions in keeping with a militant, fighting organization of the working class.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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