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# Report to the National Convention of the Socialist Party of America by the Special 1919 Election Investigating Committee: Chicago, IL — Aug. 31, 1919.

Published in the *New York Call*, v. 12, no. 250 (Sept. 7, 1919), pg.

To the National Convention, Socialist Party:

At a meeting held in Chicago on May 24-30, 1919, the National Executive Committee adopted the following:

That the Executive Secretary be instructed not to tabulate the votes cast for party officials and the convention; that a communication be sent to State Secretaries requesting them to call in all original ballots of the federations in question and sent them to the National Office, and that a committee be elected to investigate the whole question of the election and report to the national convention.

In pursuance of the above mentioned, William M. Brandt of St. Louis, Louis A. Arnold of Milwaukee, Otto Branstetter of Chicago, and Henry Askeli of the Finnish Federation were elected as the Investigating Committee.

This committee met at national headquarters on August 13, 14, 15, and again on August 29, and as a result of this investigation submit the following report:

## Report.

The result of the vote on national referendum "B," "C," and D." 1919, as shown on the face of the

returns made by the respective State Secretaries is as follows:

Referendum "B" — Yes: 18,517; No: 3,517.  
Referendum "D" — Yes: 11,105; No: 1,486.

Both these motions are, therefore, adopted.†

## Referendum "C."

A complete statement of the vote for all candidates tabulated by states is shown on the statement attached to the original of this report. The tabulation is too bulky to be duplicated in the body of this report; the following are the candidates receiving the highest number of votes and who are, on the face of the returns, elected:

### National Executive Committee. ‡

District No. 1.— Fraina: 6,261; Hourwich: 5,193; Lindgren, 3,459.

District No. 2.— Ruthenberg: 5,935; Prevey: 4,963; Harwood: 2,783.

District No. 3.— Stedman: 2,433; Lloyd: 2,296; Berger: 2,190.

District No. 4.— Nagle: 376; Hogan: 304; Millis: 191.

District No. 5.— Katterfeld: 1,223; Greenhalgh: 685; Wicks: 576.

†- Referendum "B—1919" called for the holding of a special party convention and was rendered moot by the decision of the NEC to do the same. Referendum "D—1919" put the party on record as opposing the entrance of the Socialist Party of America into any International Socialist organization other than the Third International. This marked the first of 3 times that the SPA rank and file voted to affiliate with the Comintern. The affection was not reciprocated.

‡- These results correspond exactly with those gathered from participating State Secretaries by the Left Wing in June 1919, with the exception of the result District 2, in which leading vote-getters John Keracher and Dennis Batt apparently were silently thrown out of the tabulation by the SPA Investigating Committee, based on the membership of these candidates in the expelled Socialist Party of Michigan. Exclusion of the Michigan candidates and ballots allowed sitting NEC members Seymour Stedman and Victor Berger to save face in their bid for re-election. The same was not true for James Oneal, George Goebel, and John Work, other NEC members seeking re-election. Ten of these 15 declared winners "on the face of the returns" were supporters of the Left Wing.

**International Delegates.**

Reed: 17,800; Fraina: 15,951; Ruthenberg: 10,278; Wagenknecht: 8,413.

**International Secretary.**

Hillquit: 8,205; O'Hare: 13,540.

The first report of the State Secretary of Oregon showed the Scandinavian branch of Portland casting 330 straight votes for Herman, Katterfeld, and Wicks for National Executive Committee.

A communication was later received from the State Secretary stating that this report was based upon fraudulent returns by the canvassing committee of the branch, and that, upon complaint by members of the branch, the State Executive Committee had conducted an investigation and reballoting by the branch, which resulted in 78 members casting a split vote as shown on a supplemental report (see attached communication "A"). This committee counted the corrected vote, which resulted in the election of Greenhalgh instead of Herman, who would have been elected had we counted the 330 votes first reported.†

No returns were received from Alaska, Alabama, Idaho, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Nevada, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Carolina, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming.

With the exception of Michigan, the failure of these states to report is due to the fact that the organization in those states is practically dead. In the case of Michigan, it is presumably due to the fact that the National Executive Committee revoked the Michigan charter on May 24th, 4 days before the closing of the referendums.‡

**Findings.**

Regarding the alleged fraud and irregularities in connection with the voting of the suspended federations, we find that the National Executive Committee at its meeting on May 24-30 [1919] had before it com-

plaints or charges in writing regarding such alleged irregularities from the National Secretary and from the State Secretaries of New York [Walter Cook] and Indiana, that the Secretary of Local New York [Julius Gerber] appeared in person to make such charges, and that members of the National Executive Committee from the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd districts had personal knowledge of such charges of irregularities in balloting by locals in New York, New Jersey, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin.

The action of the National Executive Committee in holding up the canvass of the returns and referring the entire question to this convention was based upon these widespread complaints, involving the balloting in most of the larger and most important of the state organizations.

We find that, in accordance with the motion quoted in the beginning of this report, the National Secretary [Adolph Germer] has sent two different communications to the State Secretaries, requesting them to secure and forward the individual ballots from the branches of the suspended federations, in order that this committee and this convention might arrive at a just conclusion regarding the alleged irregularities.

Dealing with only the larger state organizations, including a large proportion of the suspended federations, we find that the State Secretaries of Massachusetts, New Jersey, Ohio [Alfred Wagenknecht], Washington, and Minnesota [Charles Dirba] either ignored or refused the request of the National Secretary and the National Executive Committee to secure and forward the individual ballots. The State Secretaries of New York [Walter Cook], Connecticut, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Wisconsin attempted to secure the ballots as requested, but in most cases the foreign branches either failed or refused to send them in.§

Out of the approximately 560 branches in the suspended federations we have received the individual ballots from 56. Out of 103 Russian branches we have received the ballots from only 15.Δ It is reasonable to suppose that in case there were general and concerted

†- Kate Sadler Greenhalgh was a supporter of the Left Wing Section, as was in 1919 the man she defeated, Emil Herman.

‡- All of these were numerically insignificant states with the exception of Michigan, the tally of which was reported to the Left Wing during its June canvass of State Secretaries. This set of numbers should have been fairly easily obtainable by the Socialist Party's Investigating Committee, even if State Secretary John Keracher refused to provide them himself to the committee. The committee's implication that no report was possible due to the Michigan party's expulsion is factually inaccurate.

§- There was no requirement that original ballots needed to be archived by local and branch secretaries, it should be noted.

Δ- A 14.6% rate of compliance vs. about 10% for the federations overall — contrary to the tone of the report.

irregularities, the branches consciously guilty of such irregularities would refuse to turn in their ballots, and that the ballots we received were from branches in which the irregularities were either slight or unknowingly committed.

Despite the fact that we have, presumably, received the ballots from only the least guilty of the foreign branches, they show such irregularities as to justify cast suspicion on the entire vote of the federations in question.

**Exhibit A.**— Ballots of Ukrainian Branch of North Tonawanda, NY. — 40 ballots, all marked by one person and then signed by the members as shown by the signatures in different inks and pencils.

**Exhibit B.**— Ballots of Ukrainian Branch No. 63, Taylor, Pa. — Same as above. Most of the ballots filled out by one person and then signed by members in different inks.

**Exhibit C.**— Ballots of Russian Branch of Sagamore, Pa. — Ballots all marked in pencil to show the members how to vote, the members marking the ballots in ink as indicated by the pencil marks.

**Exhibit D.**— Ballots of Russian Branch of Gary, Ind. — Returns by the secretary showed this branch casting 76 straight votes for Harwood, Prevey, and Ruthenberg for the National Executive Committee and for Ferguson, Fraina, Reed, and Wagenknecht for International Delegates, and 76 for Kate Richards O'Hare for International Secretary.

A canvass of the ballots shows that 1 vote cast for Sharts for National Executive Committee was counted for Ruthenberg; that for International Delegate, 1 vote for Oneal, 2 for Engdahl, 3 for Ruthenberg, and 2 blanks were counted for Ferguson, Fraina, Reed, and Wagenknecht; for International Secretary 2 votes for Hillquit were counted for O'Hare and 16 votes on which the members did not vote for either candidate were marked and counted for O'Hare.

**Exhibit E.**— Ballots of Hungarian Branch of Racine, Wis. — Ballots all marked by same person and signed by members in pencil and different col-

ored inks.

**Exhibit F.**— Ballots of Ukrainian Branch, Hicksville NY. — Ballots all marked by same person and signed by members in pencil and different colored inks.

**Exhibit G.**— Ballots of Lithuanian Branch No. 16, Minersville, Pa. — Many of the ballots marked by the same person and signed by members in different colored inks and pencils.

**Exhibit H.**— Ballots of Russian Branch, Whit- ing, Ind. — Secretary's report shows 43 straight votes for Ferguson, Fraina, Reed, and Wagenknecht. Bal- lots show one spoiled ballot and 5 votes for Engdahl, which were counted for Ferguson and Fraina, and 2 blanks counted for Kate O'Hare.

**Exhibit I.**— Ballots of Ukrainian Branch No. 85, Vestaburg, Pa. — Many of the ballots marked by the same person and signed by members in different inks and pencils.

**Exhibit J.**— Ballots of Russian Branch, New Britain, Conn., reported 33 straight votes. Ballots show 3 votes for Germer for International Delegate counted for Fraina.

**Exhibit K.**— Ballots of Russian Branch of Cort- land, NY, reported 42 straight votes. Ballots show 1 vote for Hillquit and 1 vote for Coldwell for the Na- tional Executive Committee counted for Fraina and Lindgren, 1 vote for Ameringer for International Del- egate counted for Wagenknecht, and 28 votes for Hill- quit for International Secretary counted for O'Hare.

**Exhibit L.**— Ballots of Russian Branch of Mil- waukee show that member signed ballots marked by the secretary or some other person.

**Exhibit M.**— Ballots of Russian Branch of Hart- ford, Conn., show that members signed ballots previ- ously marked by one person.

This list of exhibits is by not means complete, but it shows the different forms and the worst examples of irregularities as shown by the ballots in our posses- sion.† Additional examples of questionable ballots are those of the Ukrainian Branch of Wilkes-Barre, Pa.;

†- There was no regulatory or constitutional prohibition against bloc voting in the Socialist Party, nor was it traditionally banned, despite the implications made in this report. In one of the great ironies of SP history, Adolph Germer himself was elected Executive Secretary over Carl D. Thompson in 1916 thanks to the bloc voting of the party's language federations. Should one believe bloc voting to be shocking and un-American, please do observe the floor action of the next Republican or Democratic national conventions when key votes are cast by state. Indeed, the constitutionally mandated electoral college system for Presidential elections is nothing more than bloc voting writ large. Along similar lines, although certainly undemocratic, an argument can be made that there was nothing formally stopping the distribution of pre-marked ballots, so long as individual members signed them and they were

Kenosha, Wis.; and Naugatuck and Waterbury, Conn. Irregularities were discovered in 12 out of 15 Russian Branches whose individual ballots were before this committee.

An investigation of the tabulated vote by branches as made by the State Secretaries discloses a surprisingly large number of the suspended branches as voting solidly for certain candidates. IN the case of small branches, casing 10 or 15 votes, it is easily conceivable that the members should vote uniformly without undue influence or pressure. But anyone familiar with the way in which the comrades vote when they are actually casting individual ballots knows that it is practically impossible that a hundred members would cast an absolutely uniform ballot.

Out of the 53 Russian branches from which we have the tabulated vote on International Delegates, 45 of them show a solid vote for the same candidates and only 8 of them show a split vote. Attached to this report is a sheet marked "Tabulation A," showing the vote of the Russian branches for International Delegates.

From Tabulation B, showing the vote of all suspended branches in New Jersey for National Executive Committee, and Tabulation C, showing their vote for International Secretary, it will be seen that the same condition exists in the branches of the other suspended federations, but not nearly to so great an extent. The vote of these branches in New Jersey is fairly representative of that in the other states from which we have the tabulations. Tabulations of the vote by branches were not furnished by Ohio and a number of smaller states.

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counted fairly. The reporting of false counts is quite another matter, this being election fraud. However, the examples here of fraudulent counts are few and, except for Exhibits "D" and "K," minor. Such crooked shenanigans were not unprecedented in the Socialist Party (see, for example, the unpublished memoir of Max Bedacht, Tamiment Library, which details a similar move on a larger scale made by California State Secretary Job Harriman in the 1917 party election, in which the Llano Colony branch vote for convention delegates was counted as a straight factional vote of 157 for the Regular slate from an election meeting attended by about 50 colonists of assorted views. [Davenport transcription, pg. 135]). What *was* unprecedented was the abrogation of an election, the suspension of entire federations using such comparatively isolated incidents as a pretext, a NEC refusing to stand down at the expiration of its constitutionally specified term, and that NEC packing the convention which was to subsequently ratify its various actions.

Not a single violation by the Latvian, Polish, or South Slavic Federations is cited in this report, yet these were also suspended. A major violation by a branch of the Scandinavian Federation is noted earlier, yet this federation was not suspended. Fairly obviously, the entire spectre of "election fraud" was a chimera aimed at disguising the NEC's real motives for its series of draconian actions. In reality, the 1919 party election was about to install 12 out of 15 new members who were supporters of the Left Wing Section; the outgoing NEC knew this. Rather than lose control of the party and be forced to exit, the outgoing NEC launched a preemptive coup, abrogating the elections on the basis of a handful of garden variety election complaints and the largely unsubstantiated bogey of mass ballot theft and box stuffing by the Russian Federation. The 7 federations were suspended by the NEC not for election fraud, as was subsequently implied, *but because each had endorsed the Manifesto and Program of the Left Wing Section of the Socialist Party.*

Uniform votes were cast by some English branches, but none of them with over 20 members except the English Branch of Minneapolis, which cast 107 straight votes for the Left Wing slate. Five small English branches in Wisconsin cast straight votes, but only 2 of these locals voted for the same candidates.

It is well known that the party branches are never able to get out a full attendance or poll full vote of all members on referendums. In this connection, it is significant that many of the foreign branches reported more votes than their average membership as shown by the purchase of dues stamps. Attached Tabulation D shows 24 Russian branches which reported more votes than their average membership, practically all of them casting a straight vote for the Left Wing candidates.

It is quite possible that at the end of any 4 month period the actual membership will be higher than the average membership for that period, but it is not probable that all of such members would attend a meeting or cast individual ballots on party referendums. The Ukrainian Branches of Chicago, who had purchased no dues stamps for 10 months, offered votes from 150 members; the Russian Branch of Milwaukee offered 185 votes, of which only 49 were eligible to vote under the party constitution of Wisconsin; the secretary of the Russian Branch of Local Richmond, New York, received ballots at his home one night between 8 and 9 pm. Although no meeting of the branch was held that night, the county secretary, Walter Dearing, received by mail before noon the following day what purported to be a tabulation of the vote as cast by this

branch. In this connection see attached communications B, C, D, and E.†

Charges have also been made that in New Jersey the State Secretary did not send ballots to English branches known or supposed to be opposed to the Left Wing. It is manifestly impossible for this committee to prove or disprove these charges. We submit two communications marked E and F.

The committee has been greatly hampered in its work by the hostility of the State Secretaries of Massachusetts, Michigan [John Keracher], Minnesota [Charles Dirba], New Jersey, New Hampshire, Ohio [Alfred Wagenknecht], Oregon, and Washington, and by most of the suspended branches, who refused to assist or cooperate in any way with the committee in its desire to make a thorough investigation and arrive at a fair and impartial decision on the charges.

From the meager data on hand, consisting of the individual ballots, reports, and communications mentioned, we submit the following:

#### **Summary.**

1. In certain branches of the Russian, Ukrainian, Hungarian, and Lithuanian Federations the members signed their names to ballots previously marked by the secretary or some other person. See Exhibits A, B, E, F, G, I, L, and M.

2. In certain Russian branches the ballots given to the members were marked to indicate how they should vote and the members voted as indicated. See Exhibit C.

3. In certain Russian branches the secretary or canvassing committee fraudulently reported a full vote for the Left Wing slate when the votes had been cast for other candidates. See Exhibits B, H, J, and K.

4. A large number of branches in all the suspended federations cast an absolutely uniform vote, generally for the same candidates, the so-called Left Wing slate.

5. A large number of branches in the suspended federations cast more votes than their average membership for the preceding 4 months. See Tabulation D.

6. In view of the fraud and irregularities discovered in the suspended branches from whom we have received ballots it is reasonable to suppose that such fraudulent, or irregular practices existed to even a greater extent in those branches which refused to furnish individual ballots, as requested by the National Executive Committee.

*William M. Brandt,  
Louis A. Arnold,  
Otto Branstetter,  
Henry Askeli.*

†- These are all examples of election fraud, and those responsible would be subject to individual disciplinary action.