

The Communist Party and Communist Labor Party

THESE are no doubt many who will find it difficult to understand how it came about that two new parties were formed at Chicago the first week of September instead of one. The breakup of the old Socialist Party, under challenge of revolutionary experience, came much more rapidly than anyone anticipated.

There was such startling quick and sure response to the Left Wing propaganda that the advance guard of the Left Wing found itself constantly prodded and pushed from behind. On the other hand the frantic efforts of the old party officialdom to stave off personal retirement and the reorganization of the party along the lines of revolutionary Socialism precipitated the crisis. The demands for new policies and a new officialdom, voiced in a series of referendums, was answered by wholesale expulsions of the aggressive membership. The breach was made complete; the old party rulers disavowed the militant membership; suspensions and expulsions followed quickly upon the first discovery of organized effort to change the character of the party. In turn, those who had repudiated the opportunistic compromises of the official Socialist Party, its refusal to align itself with the revolutionary groups of the Communist International, and its complete failure to conform its policies with the living reality of the world Social Revolution finally learned that their fight against a reactionary party officialdom must become a fight against the Socialist Party.

Here was the issue upon which the Left Wing forces split. There was the persistent belief that the militant membership could find the right method by which to tear the Socialist Party organization out of the clutches of the old officialdom. With over 50,000 members of the party disfranchised, and with the Right Wing openly proceeding to call into its Emergency Convention carefully selected henchmen from the Eastern and Central States, where most of the members could no longer vote, there were still some Left Wingers who counted upon using the Emergency Convention as the organ for revolutionizing the Socialist Party.

At the Left Wing National Conference, held at New York, June 21st to 24th, the majority plan included the use of the Emergency Convention. However, under pressure of vigorous argument in favor of immediate organization of a new party, there was the general admission that the Right Wing would not let itself be pushed into an Emergency Convention which it could not easily control. The majority argument was that there was value in the use of the Emergency Convention campaign as a means of carrying forward the Left Wing propaganda; but even the majority was careful to state a series of definite contingencies upon which the Left Wing must go ahead with the formation of a new party. It was unanimously agreed, among other alternatives, that if the representatives of the suspended and expelled organizations were refused seats in the Emergency Convention, then all the Left Wing delegates would join together to organize the Communist Party.

The vote in the Left Wing Conference on the proposition of forming the Communist Party on June 22nd was 55 to 38. This minority vote, assuming its acceptance by the membership represented, meant at once an alignment of over 30,000 members in favor of immediate formation of the new party. A group of 31 out of this minority, made up largely of Federation and Michigan delegates, organized separately upon a pro-

gram of immediate severance from the Socialist Party and a call for a convention on September first to form the Communist Party. This call was quickly accepted not only by the groups represented by these delegates, but by practically all of the disfranchised Socialist Party.

It was at once apparent that the bulk of the active Left Wing forces could have no part in the Emergency Convention. There might be argument about whether this minority group should have severed itself from the old party or not, but there could be no argument about the fact that this had happened. The Left Wing National Council could interpret its mandate from the Left Wing Conference as related to this membership no less than to any other Left Wing membership. Indeed, it was precisely this solid array of suspended and expelled organizations which had carried the Left Wing to the stage of its National Conference. Or the Left Wing National Council could close its eyes to the realities of the situation, insist upon the literalness of an instruction to use the Emergency Convention pending contingencies already fulfilled, and thereby satisfy several small groups interested for various extraneous reasons in keeping up a fight against the group definitely standing out for the Communist Party Convention.

The Left Wing National Council severely criticized the minority group upon two grounds, one the seeming desire to start the new party as a clique affair, without fair representation to all Left Wing groups; the other ground, an apparent indifference to Communist principles in joining together elements opposed in fundamental viewpoint but agreed on the starting of a new party. The first objection was answered by the agreement on representation which went into the Joint Call for the September first Convention. The second objection was answered by the reunion of the Federation groups with the Left Wing, which precluded the least possibility of deviation from the fundamentals of revolutionary Socialism at the Communist Party Convention. Only the small Michigan group had failed to accept the full implications of the Manifesto and Program of the Left Wing Conference.

The Joint Call went out twenty days before the September first Convention. It was accepted by the Massachusetts State Convention of August 11, with practically no Federation representatives present, by vote of 62 to 7. It was accepted throughout New York. It was accepted in Cleveland and Philadelphia. It ended all controversy on the question of the September first Convention in many other important locals.

Obviously the time was too short for action upon the Joint Call in the Western States. But it is beyond challenge that the strategists who maneuvered the Communist Labor Party Convention were fully informed about the Joint Call. Benjamin Gitlow of New York was a member of the National Left Wing Council, John Reed was an Associate Editor of *The Revolutionary Age*, the official Left Wing paper; Alfred Wagenknecht, Ludwig Lore, Edward Lindgren, L. E. Katterfeld, Jack Carney, Alex Bilan—all these were fully informed of the situation, and most of them were under direct membership mandate to go into the Communist Party Convention.

When the bolting delegates from the Emergency Convention came together Sunday night, August 31st, determined that there could no longer be any basis of compromise with the Right Wing, it was proposed by C.

E. Ruthenberg that the first order of business be the consideration of unity with the Communist Party Convention which was to meet the next day. But this was voted down 37 to 31. There were some who still had in mind negotiations with the Right Wing, and there were others determined at all odds to make out of this chance grouping of bolting delegates a third party in opposition to the Communist Party. At all times there were a few in this body who sincerely believed that it was their special mission to start the new party, regardless of the lineup of over fifty thousand members in the Communist Party. And there were still a few others who did not recover from their confusion until this Communist Labor Party Convention was nearly over and they realized that they had been misled under momentary enthusiasm.

Only after this meeting of bolting delegates had been given the semblance of a new party organization was the question of the Communist Party given consideration. A committee was appointed to confer with the Joint Organization Committee of the Communist Party Convention on the possibilities of uniting the two conventions. On Monday morning the two committees met. After the written answer of the Joint Organization Committee was made, it was understood that the bolting delegates would sit in a reserved section of the Communist Party Convention hall until this Convention had time to organize itself and take up the question of unity as a body. This never happened; it was only after the work of both Conventions had gone to an advanced stage that a few members of the Communist Party Convention other than the original committee of five came into contact with the Communist Party Convention.

The following are the documents interchanged between the two conventions; a committee of five having been appointed by the Communist Party Convention for the purpose of these negotiations:

STATEMENT OF COMMUNIST CONVENTION

Before the beginning of the war in August 1914 sharp differences in principles and tactics had made themselves apparent in the parties within the Second International. In each country there was the faction which placed its reliance upon the parliaments of the bourgeois state for the transformation of capitalism into Socialism. This faction, the dominant element in the Socialist Party in practically every country, directed its tactics and agitation to the end of attaining a majority in the parliaments. They argued that this majority, through legislative action would end the power of the capitalists in industry and build up the structure of the new society.

In harmony with conception it considered the activities of its parliamentary representatives for reform measures intended to improve the position of the workers under the capitalist system as the method by which Socialism would be established.

In sharp conflict with these Moderate Socialists stood the Revolutionary minorities, which rejected the idea that the class struggle could be won in the bourgeois parliaments. The Revolutionary Socialists contended that the emancipation of the working class could not be achieved through the capitalist state but only through the overthrow of the capitalist state by the mass power of the workers and the establishment of a new organ of state power by the working class, in the form of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, for the transfor-