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We Must Have a National Emergency Convention

THE decision of the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party to hold an Amnesty Convention in Chicago on May 1, in conjunction with non-Socialist organizations is a deliberate attempt to head off the demand of the rank and file for a National Convention of the party. From all over the country the demand for a National Emergency Convention is heard though all reference to its desirability is carefully omitted from the majority of the official organs of the party.

Several branches and locals have passed resolutions favoring the holding of such a convention but with the exception of Local Queen's County, New York, none of these resolutions were properly drawn and were consequently ruled out on various technicalities, though there was no doubt whatever as to the intention of the framers of the resolution or their right to be considered responsible members and bodies of the party. For example the City Central Committee of Local Boston forwarded such a resolution to the National Executive Committee early in January but it was ruled out on the ground that a delegate body had no right to frame such a resolution. This resolution was published in *The Revolutionary Age*, accompanied by an article calling for endorsement of the resolution by locals and branches. Such endorsement was given by a considerable number of party bodies, clearly showing that it voiced the sentiments of at least a considerable minority of the national membership—but the wishes of the membership apparently do not count with the N. E. C.

Although it is admitted officially that there is considerable sentiment for the calling of a National Emergency Convention, a motion to that effect proposed by Comrade Katterfield, a member of the N. E. C. is voted down only receiving the vote of Comrade Wagenknecht, while the suggestion for an Amnesty Convention, made up of various non-Socialist elements together with the Socialist Party, given by Comrade Wilson, who is not a member of the N. E. C., is carried, even Comrade Katterfield subsequently changing his vote to favor the motion. It is not claimed that the membership of the party have demanded the holding of such a convention but it is carried nevertheless in spite of the sentiment for an emergency party convention. The resolution of the delegates of Local Boston, backed by several locals and branches of the party, is rejected even when its sentiment is properly laid before the N. E. C. by a member of that body, while the suggestion made by Comrade Wilson, speaking for nobody but himself, is carried in formal motion.

The resolution offered by Local Queen's, has however now received the requisite number of seconds and must be put to a referendum of the membership. But, ever the advocate of strict parliamentary procedure and constitutional law, except in such minor matters as the election of delegates to an International Conference or the decision to align our party with a gang of international assassins, Comrade Germer rules that the motion will first have to be published in the official *Bulletin*, thereby causing a delay of 15 days or more. In other words everything is to be done to *aid* the holding of an Amnesty Convention, which apparently nobody, outside a few officials, desire, while everything is to be done to *delay* the referendum for a National Emergency Convention which is backed by the requisite number of Party branches and locals.

The decision to hold an Amnesty Convention is an attempt to use the comrades whose adherence to party principles has landed them in jail as a means of defeating the wishes of the revolutionary section of the

movement. It is the duty of the membership to boycott this bourgeois convention, a duty to themselves and to the majority of the comrades in whose name this body is called into being.

The necessity of action to obtain the release of all those imprisoned for the expression of their economic, political or religious opinions is great, but the necessity of keeping our movement in line with the march of our comrades in other lands is greater. Besides there is absolutely no reason to suppose that a National Emergency Convention would not take the matter of our imprisoned comrades under consideration, and further, there is no reason why, if the delegates so decide, ways and means of co-operating with other organizations interested in the amnesty demand could not be devised by the National Emergency Convention.

A National Emergency Convention does not preclude the consideration of a general amnesty demand, while the holding of an Amnesty Convention was

The following resolutions were adopted for national referendum by the Central Branch of Local Boston Socialist Party and seconded by Lettish Branch No. 2 (350 members) and by the Esthonian Branch (25 members):

(1) That the Socialist Party International Delegates now being elected stand instructed to participate only in an International Congress or Conference called or participated in by the Communist Party of Russia (Bolsheviki) and the Communist Labor Party of Germany (Spartacans).

(2) That the National Executive Committee shall call immediately upon the adoption of this referendum an emergency national convention of the Socialist Party to be convened in Chicago, Minneapolis or some adjacent city.

COMMENT

The international situation is a call for action. Great problems are pressing upon the party—the party must reorganize and adapt itself to new conditions.

It is imperative that the Socialist Party prepare itself, that it unify itself, that it formulate a policy expressing the requirements of the situation and the mature judgement of the membership as expressed through a convention.

The following resolution was also adopted by the Central Branch for State Referendum:

That the State Executive Committee stands instructed to call an emergency state convention in April in Boston.

clearly intended to be considered by the membership as a substitute for the party convention. The national Executive Secretary has issued the following comment to the members of the N. E. C.:

"There is but one proposed national referendum properly initiated calling for a convention. It was submitted by Local Queen's County, New York, and published in the January issue of the *Bulletin*. Today we received the first second to the motion *so the proposition of conducting a national referendum on the question of a convention is practically without support*. 'The Boston Resolution' was adopted by the City Central Committee of Local Boston and submitted for the consideration of your committee only. Delegate bodies cannot initiate referenda. *We have received letters 'endorsing' the action taken by the Boston Comrades*. In reply we have explained that we could not accept seconds to the resolution. We called the attention of those seconding the Boston resolution to the motion adopted by Local Queen's County, and *explained the action taken by your committee in calling for an Amnesty Conference*. So far we have not received a complaint against your action, from the comrades thus written to." (Our italics—the first two for comparison, which is odious, and the last to draw attention to the obvious inference.)

The Local Queen's County motion subsequently received the requisite endorsement which of course sup-

ports the supposition that the "proposition of conducting a national referendum on the question of a convention is practically without support."

We have been informed that Comrade Germer has now made an objection to the Local Queen's County motion on the ground that it was initiated by a delegate body, thus after time has been wasted in informing the locals and branches of the objection to the Boston motion and drawing attention to the Queen's County motion as one that could be seconded, the latter is to be ruled out of order and further time wasted. It is peculiar, to say the least, that Comrade Germer could see that the Boston motion was not properly formulated but that his parliamentary vision was blurred in regard to the Queen's County motion until it had received enough support to warrant its being placed before the party membership. If, as is stated in Comrade Germer's quotation above, he called attention to the motion as one that could be properly seconded it would seem that his objection is out of order at this late date. But perhaps points of order are only used against the membership!

However, to avoid further misunderstanding, we ask that the first two resolutions of the Central Branch of Local Boston printed in the box on this page be seconded by branches and locals throughout the country and such seconds immediately forwarded to the National Office and that copies of the same be sent to this paper or to the secretary of the Central Branch of Local Boston, 885 Washington Street, Boston, Mass. And in view of the statement by Comrade Germer: "So far we have not received a complaint against your action, from the comrades thus written to." It would be well for these branches to register an emphatic protest against this whole proceeding which is nothing other than an attempt to avoid calling a National Emergency Convention by those who are afraid of the stand such a convention will take.

A further motion by Katterfield: "That in the event that the motion to hold a special Socialist Party Convention is submitted for membership referendum, the Executive Secretary shall notify the states immediately regarding their apportionment of delegates" received a tie vote of 5 for and against with 5 members not voting and consequently no action was taken. Comrade Goebel explained his vote which was negative as follows: "I vote against this because I regard it as an adroit attempt to influence the vote on the proposition for a National Convention, inasmuch as calling for election of delegates to the convention at the same time as vote whether we shall have it, will make many think it an assured thing, and therefore useless to oppose, even though their judgment be that this is not yet the time for such a convention."

The calling of a Emergency Convention is a vital necessity to the welfare of the Socialist Party. The National Executive Committee has shown by its wavering attitude, by its inaction, and most of all by its decision to line up with the Scheidemanns, Huysmans and Hendersons in the reactionary Berne Conference, that it is unable to handle the present situation. Its reactionary attitude is in a large measure responsible for the omission of the party as a whole from the Bolshevik call for an International Communist Congress and consequently the classing of our movement by the revolutionary Socialists of Europe with the social-traitors. It remains for the membership of the party, which has stood true to our historic purpose in the times of stress to take the immediate management of the party into its own hands. A National Emergency Conference is the best instrument for such action. It is for the rank and file to assert themselves now and insist that such a body be called into being without further delay.