

Chicago Turns to the Left!

By I. E. Ferguson

THE Cook County Convention of May 17-18 resulted in a clean sweep for the Left Wing. It was more than a test of strength of the local opposing elements, yet even in this limited sense this Convention would be of high national significance, because the Left Wing conquest of Chicago is the best possible proof of the Left Wing conquest of the whole American party—wanting only another half year of conventions and elections to record itself in terms of a new party officialdom and a new orientation in the party policies and tactics.

(1) This Convention was a Left Wing victory on the basis of what is perhaps the most carefully and completely elaborated statement, in terms of platform and resolutions, of the Left Wing movement in this country. (2) This Convention meant a decisive conquest of a local party unit of over 6500 members; a victory so conscious of its own purposes and so definitely organized that it can only make rapid gains from day to day. (3) Finally, this Convention victory will at once be translated into a new control of Local Cook County on the firm basis of revolutionary Socialism.

These are confident claims, but need no argument beyond the textual and mathematical facts which they generalize. At this time the secretarial work has not been completed which will provide the details of the platform and resolutions adopted, but those who recall the program published by the Chicago Communist Propaganda League four of five months ago, to which has been added all available circumstances in the interim, will realize that there was thorough preparation for this Convention so far as the questions of party principles and tactics are concerned.

Postponing this part of the report to a future article, it need only be said now that an American Socialist Party on the basis of the new Cook County program would find itself in complete unity with the Communist International and with the revolutionary proletariat of the United States. A Chicago Left Wing victory takes special significance not only from the importance of the local itself, and the industrial territory tributary to Chicago, but also from the fact that this is the headquarters of the old party regime. The Chicago movement has never had distinctive local character, because its leadership has been tinged with the party officialdom coming in from all over the country.

But the point to be emphasized is the organized character of this Left Wing victory. To the Right Wingers and Centrists this was the mystifying and annoying circumstance. They could understand lots of more or less aimless talking and more or less confused voting, but the sight of a solid Left phalanx of about 400 votes out of some 650—a solid, fairly uniform vote, going with a definite, clear-cut program, carefully discussed and criticised for weeks ahead,—that was not their idea of a "Socialist convention."

The first and perhaps the clearest test vote came with the election of the Resolutions Committee, after Comrade William Bross Lloyd had easily been seated as Chairman as the Left Wing candidate. The highest vote for one of the official family as candidate for the Resolutions Committee was 177; one of the most popular Socialists in Chicago, who has failed to make clear his understanding and alignment on the issues before the party, and may therefore be characterized at the moment as Centrist, received 236 votes; while the five Left Wing candidates averaged close to 400 votes, the high vote going to 448.

The representative character of this Convention is evident from the large number of delegates and the high attendance, the basis of representation being 1 delegate to 10 members. The general issues to come before the Convention had been discussed more or less thoroughly in something like 50 branches, so there was nothing here in the nature of surprise or hasty judgment. The main portions of the resolutions had been published in the Chicago Socialist two weeks before the Convention, and a series of debates had been staged between representatives of the opposing camps.

The Left Wing movement in Chicago, taking its theoretical initiative in the work of the Communist Propaganda League, had assumed definite organization character in about two dozen of the most important

branch units of the city. Under the able and aggressive leadership of Comrade Alexander Stoklitsky, now acting as Translator-Secretary for the Russian Federation, the Russian-speaking branches have received intensive education in the principles of revolutionary Socialism. The Lithuanian Translator-Secretary, Comrade Stilson, the Lettish Secretary, Comrade Perin, the Hungarian Secretary, Comrade Frankel, and many others in the "language" groups have co-operated ably in a dual educational-organization campaign, which showed its results at the Cook County Convention, and is bound within a few months to compel a clear alignment of the American party with the Communist International.

Some of the fundamental snobbery and narrow nationalism of the Right Wingers displayed itself in clumsily indirect insinuations about the "alien" character of the Left Wing—while over-protesting their own own adherence to Socialist internationalism!

This much detail is given to emphasize the organized character of the Chicago Left Wing strength. There is not a branch in the city or county without Left Wing adherents, but the assured control lies in the two dozen or more branches which stand as units on a well-defined program of revolutionary Socialism. This con-

trol has already reflected itself sufficiently in the county organization to assure the Left Wing of the fruits of its victory in relation to the local party and other official activities.

On the other hand the demoralization of the "fictitious" element displayed itself in an almost ludicrous bolting of the Convention during its second session. The Napoleon of the exodus, which took about 10% of the Convention, certainly less than 10%, was quite amiable Comrade Seymour Stedman, who momentarily forgot his responsibility as one of the National Executive Committee and forgot to use his own better judgment. This handful of delegates, who have been insistent for half a year that somebody was trying to split the party, when faced with the realization that the party was reorganized right under their eyes, without a murmur about a secession, decided to prove that there was a desire to split the party by trying a little splitting on their own account.

The Convention went through its three sessions of May 18th without a word of curiosity about the bolters, and with relief from their silly tactics of time-killing and obstruction. The opposition to the Left Wing expressed itself in debate and questioning; and the opportunity for real discussion was never cut off by the Left Wing. About all the writer heard of the bolters was that they started a meeting in a nearby hall, but soon came to the conclusion that no one knew what they wanted to do. It was quite apparent that all except the most conspicuous figures finally found their way back to the Convention.

Only Stedman is named from among the little band of bolters because the writer is confident that Stedman regretted his excited action within an hour after the secession; and this typifies the Convention split as not at all a forecast of any rupture in the local organization. Stedman absolutely realized: the opening of the Convention that the Left Wing had a solid two-thirds vote, which would have easily increased at once if the fight had been made on principles, instead of by sharpening lines by dilatory jockeying which compelled a seemingly harsh offensive on the part of the Left Wing. If anything further is heard of party-splitting in Chicago, Stedman and his dozen or so of official lieutenants will stand convicted of a pre-calculated design toward that end; at least, the deliberate raising of the vanity of personal opinion, or lack of basis for intelligent opinion, above the level of devotion to the Socialist movement.

So much concerning the mechanics and history of this important Convention. Its contributions toward the working out of the new character of the American Socialist movement, in terms of program, tactics, and questions of party organization will be considered in another article.

One comment is made now to counter the impression of an organized vote as indicating a follow-the-leader Convention, all rehearsed in advance. As emphasized above, the main party issues had been thoroughly discussed in advance and the results reduced to definite form, but without prompting or even the cooperation of those conspicuous on the floor for the Left Wing there were resolutions introduced touching every instant proletarian fight of revolutionary significance. The comrades abroad and our own class-war comrades in the jails, the strike of Lawrence and Winnipeg, and the fighting I. W. W.—the revolutionary proletarians everywhere were recognized in kinship in that Convention in the most convincingly genuine way that the writer has ever witnessed in any Socialist gathering. And it is this spontaneous sensitiveness to the world fight of the rising proletariat by the conscious American proletarians which is the vitality of the revolutionary Socialist movement in the United States.

The anniversary of Italy's entrance into the world war passed without any demonstration of celebration the press reports. Apparently the Italian people are recovering their poise.

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