

# The Counter-revolution in the Party

By I. E. Ferguson

Report of the N. E. C. sessions at Chicago

THE counter-revolution within the American Socialist Party has begun. It is comic in its explosiveness and impotence. It makes piercingly clear the tragedies averted by the quick success of the Left Wing movement within the party. . . .

The National Executive Committee came together May twenty-fourth, at Chicago, and before two hours had gone by, without charges, hearing, or intelligent statement of any kind, seven men "expelled" five thousand Socialists of the State of Michigan from the American Socialist Party. And that was only the beginning. When the true logic of this action reveals itself, as the business advances, the expulsion—slaughter will quickly jump from the 5000 to 6000 of Michigan to the more than 60,000 already clearly within the Left Wing—within the "insurgency" which "must be put down."

Hillquit is not here. He is sick. His intellectual presence is evidenced by a communication outlining the stand of the N. E. C. on the issues before us, national and international. The proposed statement is of a sick mind. It faces no issue squarely; it is sheer nothingness; it is not even clever in its equivocations.

One example will suffice. On the issue of the two Internationals, Hillquit is critical of the Berne Conference and opposed to the Communist International. He wants "reunion"—with Luxemburg and Liebknecht dead, murdered under the auspices of opportunistic Socialism! Hillquit joins all Internationals—and none.

Otherwise, aside from unprincipled statement of principles which can be considered after revision by the Committee, Hillquit is advertised as being in favor of a party split.

Berger, too, is absent. But he has several mouth-pieces here.

The "expulsion" of Michigan was voted by Shiplacoff, O'Neal, Goebel, Krafft, Stedman, Work, Hogan and Holt. The contrary votes were two, Wagenknecht and Katterfeld. The other absentees are Clark and Herman, in jail, and Niells of California.

The motion was made by Stedman, after recommendation of action by the Executive Secretary, Adolph Germer. Stedman moves to destroy the votes which will put him off the N. E. C. and which will help defeat him for International Delegate. Work and Berger likewise need to escape the Michigan votes. Also O'Neal, Shiplacoff and Hillquit, in relation to international representatives.

Only John Work squirmed a bit under Wagenknecht's descriptives of this method of winning an election. Work would have given Michigan a "hearing," but the amendment failing, he accepted Stedman's motion.

Holt of Oklahoma thought the Committee might with a few days. The action of the Committee as "explained" by Stedman, was based on the adoption by the Michigan State Convention of an amendment to the State Constitution prohibiting advocacy of reforms in the propaganda of Socialism. This resolution of the Michigan Convention, everything else aside, had not yet been finally acted upon by the Michigan membership. It appeared that the result of the Michigan referendum would be available within three or four days. Holt was willing to wait until the membership of Michigan had gone "contrary" to the national platform, but Stedman had "a hunch" that the vote would be overwhelmingly in favor of the Convention resolution, and this settled the matter.

Katterfeld and Wagenknecht defended the Michigan stand against advocacy of reforms. Wagenknecht pointed out that other States, notably Wisconsin, had seen fit to omit our "ultimate demands" from their platforms. He might have added that it is only by casuistical argument from a chance phrase or two that one can discover any "ultimate demands" in the National platform of 1918. Wagenknecht impressed the vote-stealing aspect of Stedman's motion, and added good-naturedly that it would only be a short time until we changed the national platform to conform to that of Michigan.

To which Hogan retorted that it would be "just as well to dishand the party"—and this was the sum total of his pudgy wisdom in relation to this question. And Goebel played the clown to perfection. Once before the writer saw the excitable, peevish Goebel in action, and that was at the meeting of the N. E. C. in Chicago when Goebel went into wild raving against the party's anti-war stand. Now he is the most vociferous exponent of "real Socialism!"

Shiplacoff and O'Neal indulged in evasive refinements and sophistries which simply revealed that they were acting somewhat under the whip—and there was a fellow present by name of Gerber, from New York, a sort of Mephisto of small politics, presumably one of the coterie who planned this performance. Not that Shiplacoff and O'Neal were not against the Michigan position; only they are the kind of men who

must be driven into action with a whip.

Another tangent of the Michigan discussion was the stand of the Michigan Convention on the subject of religion. The Michigan position is that the subject of religion should not be under party taboo, but should be frankly presented according to the materialistic interpretation of history. Committeeman Krafft of New Jersey was especially sarcastic on this point as a deviation from party regularity, arguing that it was members of the Knights of Columbus who secured his release from Atlanta, where he was serving a term under the Espionage Act. . . . The first time the word "revolution" happened to be mentioned in the discussion, this elderly gentleman from New Jersey raised both hands in derision. Perhaps he missed the whole record of world events during the past two years. Krafft is unquestionably a fine, worthy, idealistic gentleman. His presence on this Committee, and its accord with his political outlook, tells in a word the present status of the official control of the American Socialist Party.

The clown-like Goebel hailed in this religious clause "the cloven hoof"—the basis of "organizing to fight the Socialist Party." The weightiness of Goebel's learning about Socialism does not keep him anchored very long at a time. He is constantly jumping up, walking around, pounding the table; and his talk is a squeakish whine about one triviality after another.

It is a curious spectacle, this group of half dozen old men taking upon themselves the stemming of the oncoming waves of a re-vitalized American Socialism. It answers itself without a word from the outside.

So much for the first session. There will be several days of lifeless life to this conference, though the first act leaves no question of what is to follow.

A week ago a history-making convention closed in Chicago with such a singing of the Internationale as was never heard in that city before. The words of a dozen languages merged in robust melody.

At this N. E. C. meeting one could not escape consciousness of the unsung dirgeful accompaniment: "The old-time religion; the good old-time religion, the old-time religion is good enough for us."

## Session of May 26th

All on a Monday morning the half dozen elder statesmen of the Socialist Party are going to dispose of the Left Wing movement. That is the special order of business. . . . It is like the Senate Judiciary Committee getting rid of Bolshevism by orders of excommunication via imprisonment. It is lucky for many of us that the Socialist Party National Executive Committee has no prison at its disposal and no power of deportation. . . .

The boast of these elder statesmen is the ancient vintage of their statemanship. Constantly they repeat the number of years which separates the present from the time they acquired the Socialist consciousness. They do not seem remotely to suspect that there might be need for a new kind of Socialist consciousness in a new epoch of history.

The Committee proceeds with its task. "The method," "the method," "the method"—that is the constant complaint, supported by sweeping generalities and accusations based on most petty items of detail, uncorroborated and not open to answer. One would never suspect that there is anything involved in this flood of righteous indignation other than the accumulation of details of "unconstitutionality."

Out with the elections—that was the wholesale order for this morning. The Federations will be on the carpet tonight. Elections aside—pending investigation for "irregularities"—the mathematical problem is how to regulate the further expulsion so as to insure a "safe" Convention.

Because of this cancellation of elections until the Convention meets, the Committee itself calls a Special Convention. Goebel, Work, Hogan, go on record that the election issue is the only emergency. Shiplacoff realizes that there is an "emergency" aside from the elections. Wagenknecht and Katterfeld agree to the Special Convention except as to the election matter.

The discussion opened with a statement by Goebel that the initiation of the referendums now before the party were "deliberately fraudulent;" because they came from delegate bodies, instead of from membership bodies. He said that the method of carrying on the elections was the "open shameless method of slates . . . accompanied with misleading comment." He complained that the official side was without papers, (though the Milwaukee Leader, so far as this district is concerned, pleaded for the re-election of

Berger, Stedman and Work). He indignantly charged that the Foreign Federations have banded together to capture the party. He failed to add for what purpose.

Julius Gerber was given the floor to report for the New York State Executive Committee as to the New York situation. The "report" was a speech, made up of accusations against the Left Wing, with several specifications of "unconstitutionality," and a general justification of everything done by the New York Executive Committee. Gerber answered a joint Federation protest against expulsions in New York of certain foreign branches. This protest came before the Committee directly after Gerber was on the ground.

Gerber's contention was that Local New York insists upon its right to compel all branches to adhere to the regular party platforms, and that the Left Wing platform was adopted by the rebel branches "wilfully" in violation of the party law. The petty sarcasms of Gerber, and the whistling astonishment of the venerable delegate from New Jersey, and the equally profound comments of the other elder statesmen, are not worth dwelling upon, though it is of this stuff that party history is being made. Gerber's sarcasm about Left Wing work within the party councils as showing no interest in "work against the capitalist system" is indicative of the grasp of issues here paraded as the acme of Socialist wisdom.

Referring to an application of a Russian branch for a charter in New York, which was refused, Gerber "explained" that 2 Russian branches were enough for New York. The writer is informed that there are 60,000 Russians in New York. Even Chicago has 7 Russian branches, of which some are already unwieldy.

Without an item outside of the Gerber's speech to the N. E. C., it was made evident that the Executive Committee of Local New York and of New York State had substituted their control for that of the party membership. This seems to be the precedent upon which the N. E. C. is proceeding.

One gem of the discussion was that the New York Local does not "expell" anybody. It simply "reorganizes,"—according to Shiplacoff,—"a mere formal-ity."

Germer added the item of the mysterious disappearance of 15,000 ballots. It was all very, very mysterious, until Wagenknecht did a little questioning and developed the facts that this was a computation based on weighing ballots, making no allowances for differences in weight of different kinds of print paper.

Krafft challenged the opposition to make answer, to which Katterfeld responded. If there was any ballot-box stuffing, it ought to be investigated. But the voting of slates, which was so much protested, has been usual within the party. That was precisely the way Germer became National Secretary, by organized Federation slating. After reviewing the details of the discussion, Katterfeld went on to say that he took all the actions of the majority of the Committee serenely and expressed his assurance that they could not do enough to prevent victory within the party for revolutionary Socialism. He concluded that it was up to the majority of the Committee to prove their loyalty to the Socialist movement by handing over the power to the majority of the membership, if they want it, instead of wrecking the party to save their power.

With the elections and referendums temporarily invalidated, the Special Convention was moved by Work and unanimously carried, though Goebel protested the expense.

Then came the question of investigating the elections and the motion prevailed that the committee shall be appointed outside the N. E. C. Wagenknecht amended: "from both sides." O'Neal, in high dignity: "The party does not recognize the Left Wing!" Goebel, aside to Wagenknecht: "Both sides will be represented." Amendment defeated, 2 to 8.

Next: Constitution "interpreted" to invalidate some Left Wing candidacies for International Delegates. (Reed and Ferguson). It must have meant to exclude those not members three years. The logic for the 3-year rule is excellent. The fact is that the members have already acted under a Constitution which does not prohibit these candidacies. Goebel already has insisted that there is no personal element in these elections; that this is, for once, a vote on issues. This belated "interpretation" helps to register the vote on issues.

Wagenknecht amended that this ruling be not applied to an election already completed, when it was apparent that there was knowledge or fear of Left Wing success. Amendment defeated.

Shiplacoff made the complacent assumption that those not in the party three years could not know anything about Socialism. He was just as charitable to the membership which supported these candidates. He is a personal gainer by this elimination of contestants.

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