

Monday evening session, May 26th.

Motion by Krafft: whereas, and whereas, and whereas—let 30,000 members of the Socialist Party stand suspended! All the "whereases" of the Krafft motion were based on the language of a protest against the expulsion of foreign branches in New York, the protest being signed by the Translator-Secretaries of the Russian, Lettish, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Hungarian, South Slavic and Polish Federations. The history of this transaction shows its purely arbitrary and vindictive nature; it shows on its face how every subterfuge is used to disfranchise the opposition in order to win control of the coming Emergency Convention for the present officialdom.

Gerber of New York had volunteered to the N. E. C. certain allegations of fact and sweeping charges as to illegal voting by Federation branches on the party referendums. The meagre showing of facts was never scrutinized by the Committee; no explicit charges were made against any particular ones of the Federations; nobody was asked or given the chance to answer Gerber's assertions. It became evident as the discussion proceeded that the Federations had been hampered in the elections by holding back of ballots; that Left Wing votes had been freely kept out, or even destroyed after receipt in the New York office. In Milwaukee, for instance, the Federations were refused ballots from the County office, and these finally obtained were imported from Minnesota. In Chicago, a Ukrainian branch of 300 members was given 35 ballots. At this time no more need be said about the elections, which are to be "investigated," than that there was nothing definite enough before the N. E. C. with respect to the elections upon which to base any action against the Federations. This the Committee itself recognized.

The insistence of the Translator-Secretaries on tolerance for the adherents of the Left Wing was condemned as "disloyalty" to the party platform and a breach of the party constitution. Judgment being duly entered, the "trial" began.

The document of protest stated that the Executive Committees of Local New York and of New York State had arbitrarily expelled three Federation branches; that the National Executive Secretary had reported these expulsions as arising from the affiliation of these branches with the Left Wing Section; and that this action was not only a disgrace to the Socialist movement, but that "the Russian, Lithuanian, Lettish, Ukrainian, Hungarian, and South Slavic Federations have endorsed the Left Wing program, recognizing in it the most advanced expression of revolutionary Socialist principles, and we declare that these Federations will brook no opposition to the stand they have taken and will not consider as valid any proposal from any Executive Committee, either county, state or national, to recede from that position. We do not consider that any Executive Committee has any right to pass on the legality of the Left Wing position, as far as the party law is concerned." The "demands" were for rescinding the New York expulsions, with censure of the officials responsible; also for "a clear and unequivocal expression" by the N. E. C. as to its attitude toward the Left Wing position, "inasmuch as no such expression has as yet come from the National Executive Committee."

"Such a drastic statement," announced Committeeman Krafft, "calls for drastic action on the part of the Executive Committee." After his series of "whereases," consisting of citations of the sentences, above quoted as "in defiance of the rules of the Socialist Party," came the motion that these seven Federations "stand suspended until further notice."

Motion seconded by Shiplacoff. "It is the only course left for us. . . . Two weeks ago I would not have said so." (It is during these two weeks that some of the party election returns have become known). Shiplacoff argued that the main business of the party has been that of a political party; an American political party to develop an American political movement based on the principles of Socialism. The Federations were organized to facilitate propaganda among immigrants. The nationalistic influence and the war have unbalanced many, at both extremes. The foreign element is in the minority; we must build on "native elements." (The Indians? In the steel, packing, cotton, clothing and woolen industries, the average of "foreigners" is 64%. The "native" proletariat is predominantly black. There is no proletarian element in America which surpasses in calibre the membership of these seven Federations).

The Lithuanian Translator-Secretary, James Stilson, was spokesman for the Federations. He pointed out that this was the first statement of the official party attitude toward the Left Wing; that at its last meeting, in January, the N. E. C. knew of the Left Wing movement within the party, but did not act, presumably because it had no constitutional power to act. He denied that this movement was of such recent origin, showing its definite organization early in 1917 through the Socialist Propaganda League, with a separate paper, *The Internationalist* (subsequently *The New Internationalist*). The Manifesto of this League

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appeared in the *Minnesota Organizer*, the official State paper, in February and again in March of 1917. If the officialdom made no condemnation of the organization of the Left Wing, how could it now condemn endorsement of the Left Wing program?

Comrade Wagenknecht added that the Left Wing movement was a natural expression at this time in the Socialist parties of every country.

Then came the climax of the seven days of this eventful N. E. C. meeting. Niels Christensen, Scandinavian Translator-Secretary, was granted the floor. In firm, deliberate language, impassioned yet clearly reasoned, he condemned the action of the Committee. "If this is your stand, then I want to be counted in with the others."

Seymour Stedman comes out of this discussion with the clear distinction of being the only one of the majority members of the N. E. C. who was frank enough to admit that the question of methods of bringing about the party change was beside the point; and that the organized voting of the Left Wing branches was entirely proper; and that, in general, the attempt to organize the Left Wing for capture of the party for their view point was legitimate and commendable for its efficiency. His argument was that there is a fundamental difference of understanding of the purposes of the Socialist Party upon which there must be a split. (He did not explain why he and his associates should not "suspend" themselves, instead of the successful opposition). The psychology of the American is to approach politics in an immediate way, and this is the basis upon which the Socialist Party started. It has developed a real political character in Wisconsin, New York, and to some extent in Ohio. Otherwise it has existed as an organization for education—education for the time when the revolution takes place. He has no fault to find with such an organization. The question is: shall we maintain ourselves as a political party? That is, a party for regular political campaigns, on current issues, with real purpose of winning offices, not campaigns as propaganda camouflage. Or shall we be a party with politics as an incidental affair? He is for politics, and others are against this stand because they cannot vote. They would be happy if Berger is not seated. (Because of their ideas about use of parliamentarism, or because Berger is Berger?) Stedman wants more Milwaukee "Socialism."

Comrade Stilson then asked if this meant that all of the Left Wing was to be thrown out? Stedman replied frankly that this was the sense in which he would vote. No other member of the Committee made answer.

The debate was continued by Comrade Wagenknecht. If there is to be a test of what the party stands for, it should be had before there is so much expelling. Let everybody vote for delegates to the Convention, and those who don't like the decision can get out. But there had better be a quick adjournment, or the Convention will be useless, because with the start of 5,000 and then 30,000 the Committee may yet get rid of the whole party. The proposition is to tear down the Federations because they have out-distanced the English-speaking movement, due to the fact that the efficiency in building up the English-speaking movement has been almost nil. This action is obviously taken to control the Convention. This action is a confession of lack of majority support. It may be due, fundamentally, to the fear that the Socialist Party is becoming too much a party of action; to the desire not to have any more imprisonments, to avoid such things as the May Day riots. The outstanding fact is that revolutionary parties have become parties of revolution, in deeds as well as in words.

Wagenknecht concluded his statement by emphasizing the naturalness of the growth of particular Federations in response to the revolutions in Europe. The Italian revolution will bring a great influx into the Italian Federation. It took some time to bring the conviction of the Soviet Government as a permanent institution, so that the response was not immediate. But the Russian Federation itself, which has had the largest recent growth, was just given a Translator-Secretary last Winter; and it now shows the splendid results of an intensive and aggressive campaign of education.

At this point the Finnish Translator-Secretary asked to be heard. This was another bomb in the camp of the Right Wing and Centrists. Askele assured the Committee that his Federation would go solidly with the Left Wing if this action was taken. He pleaded that this matter be let go until there should be a Convention.

Then came a long, judge-like harangue by Committeeman O'Neal. He reviewed the history of revolutionary currents within the American Socialist movement, picking out the few instances of intellectual leaders who had flopped from extreme radicalism to extreme conservatism. (The writer recalls precisely the same argument, some of the same illustrations, and

almost the same sentences, as used by O'Neal in a pamphlet on Syndicalism written nearly seven years ago. Our profound "historian" analyzes the Left Wing movement and Syndicalism as the plaything of a handful of intellectuals, of exaggerated emotionalism, ignoring completely the real social and political basis of the two vital challenges—both mass movements—against the reformist parliamentarism of the Second International; the challenge against its Socialism, and the challenge against its tactics of a 'political action' unrelated to the proletariat and its special class position and power. It is all a matter of "psychologizing" the "leaders," as O'Neal reads history).

The acknowledged spokesman for the majority of the Committee, after explaining the psychology of radicalism and, much as Nordau deals with genius, reducing it all to a formula of emotional insanity, proceeded to explain further that the Left Wing, under the influence of the Russian Revolution, wants to transplant foreign policies and graft them on this country. No uniform methods can be adopted throughout the world. (Evidently the imperialistic diplomats at Paris did not consult with O'Neal, because their "internationalism" is much more than a formula of phrases.) No uniform methods can be adopted throughout the world (for each country its own Socialism, no matter that the nationalistic capitalisms are but units of the world Capitalism arrayed against the world social revolution). We have been too long dominated by the German Social Democracy and do not want now to subject ourselves to Russian domination (therefore we remain as we are, i. e., under German domination).

A large part of O'Neal's argument concerned itself with the fact that Soviet imitation is not now historically justified in the United States, which is a logical criticism. But not of the Left Wing, because the idea of the Soviet in the Communist program goes with the actual period of revolution, and so it is stated in the Left Wing programs. The acceptance of the Bolshevik analysis of the present period as the era of world social revolution, the realization of finance-imperialism as the final stage of Capitalism, and the acceptance of a general revolutionary tactic in conformity with the present stage of struggle, does not mean a copying of the Russian experience in the United States without the fullest recognition of every special element in our situation. O'Neal insists rather upon the differences as fundamental, whereas passing history answers that it is the sameness and unity of the struggle in all countries which is fundamental.

O'Neal inadvertently, yet quite conclusively, disposed of the test of revolutionary-mindedness arising from convictions under the Espionage Act. They were "all a matter of chance," instancing Krafft's sentence to five years "for hardly saying anything." To this ironic truth must be added the reservation that there is a clear record of a National Security League hounding of a few outstanding champions of the working class.

Comrade Katterfeld put the responsibility for the present party confusion directly on the N. E. C. for its failure to call a Convention. The Left Wing organization within the party organization was necessary as the only means of allowing the party to function.

There was one thing in the whining of Goebel which the writer has noted. He was sure that what he said would be forgotten. Goebel was still hopeful of the Finns and Germans.

The Federation matter was put over again until the next afternoon.

Tuesday morning, May 27th.

Motion by Goebel that an Emergency Convention be called for Labor Day. Amendment by Katterfeld, that it be called for August 2nd. On this amendment the minority members, Katterfeld and Wagenknecht, were joined by Shiplacoff. The date voted was August 30th, and the place, Chicago. The number of delegates, as at St. Louis, 200.

Tuesday afternoon.

Comrade Keracher, as State Secretary, appeared before the Committee to get official confirmation of the action taken against the Michigan party. On the third guess, one of the Committee stated accurately the action taken: that the charter of Michigan had been revoked. The reason? O'Neal was designated to make the reply and haughtily put the Committee above the level of entering into explanations or argument with Comrade Keracher, stating merely that the anti-reform advocacy plank of the Michigan platform was a violation of the National Party law.

Secretary Germer then assumed the role of prosecuting attorney against the Federations. He charged them with attempting to dominate the party, citing a resolution against the Amnesty Convention which originated in one of the Federation offices. This was a regular referendum proposition, handled in the regular way, but apparently it was intrusive for these "foreigners" to question the wisdom of the N. E. C. And great, indeed, was the righteous indignation of the venerable Krafft. Germer detailed the figures of the growth of

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