

Chicago—Running True to Form

By Barnet Braverman

THE expected happened.

Once again moderate "Socialists" have been tried and have met all expectations of those who know them. This on May 18th and 19th, 1919, when the Socialist Party of Cook County, Illinois, held its convention and adopted a Left Wing platform.

I repeat, the moderate "Socialists" in this convention ran true to form. Not being in Germany they could not muster machine guns, poison gas, and bayonets against the revolutionary Left Wing that dominated the Cook County convention. The moderates answered the organized decisions and ideas of the Left with venomous vituperation, dilatory tactics; and failing in these, tried the wiles and blandishments of sentimental appeal about "comradeship" and "party unity."

"Let us keep party unity," pleaded the exponents of the moderates, only to follow this plea by bolting the convention. Some of the bolters threatened to organize another party; others considered the feasibility of purchasing space in the capitalist dailies to tell the public just why they, the moderates, bolted the convention. Brilliancy indeed!

As a quiet observer of the convention, I had ample opportunity and provocation to reflect upon the conduct of the reactionary minority with their mental incapacity to adjust themselves to a new historical situation.

If the reactionary moderates deemed party unity of importance, why did they bolt the convention? Couldn't they tolerate the proposal, "All power to the workers"? They didn't have enough poise to maintain a philosophical, unperturbed attitude when they saw their middle class reforms thrown into the discard by the convention. Middle class rule in the Socialist Party was very pleasant for a few while it lasted. From the moment the rank and file awoke to endorse the revolutionary Left Wing, with its demand for

mass action, with its insistence upon "All power to the workers," the moderates began and are using deceitful sophistry and evasiveness as their only weapons. Here is the platform resolution that led the reactionary minority to bolt the convention:

"Socialist Party platforms, proceeding on the basis of the class struggle, and recognizing that the Socialist movement has come into the historical period of revolution, can only contain an explanation of the class struggle and the demand for all power to the workers, for a dictatorship of the proletariat."

"A municipal platform of Socialism cannot proceed on a separate basis, but must conform to the general platform, simply relating the attainment of local power to the immediate goal of gaining national power. There are no city problems within the terms of the class struggle, only one problem of capitalist vs. proletarian domination. The particular evils of national, state and city government are merely illustrative of the central problem and should be so presented: they should not be listed as the thing to be remedied, item by item, as the basis of Socialist political activity. The municipal platform of Socialism, like all other platforms can contain only one demand: all power to the workers—local power as the basis of further gains."

The above section was adopted by a vote of 389 to 83. After the vote was taken the Right Wing metamorphosed itself into a shrieking bedlam, determined to sabotage the convention. The moderates displayed their fear by refusing to oppose their real reformist policy to that of the Left which called for mass political action until "All power to the workers" becomes an established fact. The action, the bedlam, of the Right Wing "Socialists" revealed the bankruptcy of their policy as fundamentally counter-revolutionary, a policy adapted to the needs of state Capitalism versus Socialism.

The moderates were chagrined at the manner in which one revolutionary plank after another was

adopted by the convention. The rank and file of the membership knew what they wanted, and so there wasn't opportunity for the old guard to use its parliamentary trickery and bullying. Everything in the convention was done openly, in clear-cut fashion; and this only served to infuriate the old guard. The anger of the moderates found expression in childish derision of proletarian dictatorship and an approximate one hundred "appeals from the decision of the chair," for the sole purpose of delaying the business of the convention. I may add that I have seen chairmen heckled but never did I think it possible for individuals supposed to bear some prestige to be as petty in the grounds for attack as the moderates' leaders were. "Cheap" would be an appropriate, truthful adjective to apply to their antics.

The "Amnesty" convention, being promoted by non-class interests, was repudiated by the Left Wing delegates by more than two-thirds vote. It was maintained by the Left Wing that it is futile to "appeal" to a government that incarcerated the political and class war prisoners, and equally as useless to work with bourgeois organizations inherently reactionary in spirit.

But the action of the moderate "Socialists" at this convention was not surprising in the least, not more so than the performances of the moderate "Socialists" of New York and in Germany. In Chicago, the reactionary minority ran true to form in their opposition to proletarian revolution.

"All power to the workers" has a wider appeal to the needs of the proletariat than such insipid Bergeresque, reactionary middle class reforms as cheaper gas, milk, car fare. The Left Wing demand, "All power to the workers" is a demand for action, now and all the time, for the proletariat to seize Power, and consciously to determine the establishment of a republic for workers.

The Counter-revolution in the Party

(Continued from page six)

several of the Federations during the past two years insisting that the recent progress was artificially stimulated. He read translations from the Lithuanian paper to instance attacks on the N. E. C. and support of the Left Wing. (These articles, by the way, as well as all the statements of the Translator-Secretaries involved, were of such clear, consistent, and aggressive character as to give the highest possible encouragement for the future of the Socialist movement in America.)

It appeared then that O'Neal and Shiplacoff had spent a good part of the night in revamping the "whereases" of the Krafft motion. Krafft promptly withdrew his motion and the more formal motion was entered by Shiplacoff. Evidently the weakening Centrists had been stiffened up in caucus. All this is highly significant because it proves of itself that the desire was to get rid of certain votes, which were too well organized for the conquest of the party for revolutionary Socialism—and the reasons for the "suspension" had to be discovered after the act.

Comrade Stilson spoke at some length for the Federations, without being presented with any definite charge except that the Federations were for the Left Wing and therefore "unconstitutional." He read the party constitution and showed clearly that there was nothing in the constitution upon which the Committee could base its power to take this action. He showed that there are many Left Wing locals still in the party, in relation to which the N. E. C. took no action, leaving the party in a condition of "chow chow." The Federations are in the Left Wing; that is true. They made slates for the party elections; they will do so again. When the N. E. C. was insistently asked for an Emergency Convention, it declared for an Amnesty Convention. There was no fight against the Left Wing until the officials realized that the party machinery was about to slip out of their hands.

Then, after all this discussion, and after all these expulsions, came the pronouncement of Shiplacoff: "The Left Wing movement doesn't exist." To which Stilson rejoined: "Then what are you talking about?" To the complaint that there was no other way out, Stilson answered: "You join the Labor Party and let the Socialist Party take care of itself."

Note, then, that as to the South Slavic Federation there was nothing before the Committee except the signature on the protest against the New York expulsions; that the Secretary made clear that the membership of this Federation had not yet acted on the Left Wing program. As to the Polish Federation, the entire case was the Translator-Secretary had affixed his name to the protest after it was completed, not having taken part in the conference between the Secretaries. There was no report of action by the Polish Federation on the Left Wing program. As to the

Hungarian Federation, the signature on the protest, and not one other word in any other connection.

Comrade Wagenknecht pointed out that the comrades in New York have been up against a well-organized official machine for a long time, and that this situation should have been taken care of long ago. This is the sort of thing which brings about factional extremes. But we must keep the big issues in mind. The Left Wing expressions are membership expressions. They show that the party is in good health. The members should not wait for Conventions to express their opinions for them, but have the right all the time to propose changes within the party. It was these same Secretaries who came before this Committee to protest against sending delegates to the Berne Conference, which shows that they have been more accurate in their understanding of the world situation than the Committee itself. "Your hurry exposes your motives." Only the two Left Wing members of the N. E. C. voted for the Convention three months ago.

Comrade Katterfeld recalled the factional organization within the N. E. C. itself to repudiate the St. Louis platform. Four members of the Committee nearly succeeded in defeating the will of the membership, expressed by a twelve to one vote. Four members who were pro-war now constitute a majority of the minority which is taking the party into its own hands at this time. (These four are Goebel, Hogan, Holt and Krafft, the other three, Work, O'Neal and Shiplacoff, with Stedman absent at this time).

The amendment to delay the "trial" two weeks was defeated, 2 to 7. The resolution of "suspension" was passed, 7 to 2. Later, the "suspension" was given practical interpretation as expulsion by ordering the Translator-Secretaries to vacate their offices by June 10th.

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Wednesday morning, May 28th

A communication was read urging the Socialist Party to get together with the Labor Party, since the platforms were so much alike. This unconscious satire, however, was quite in point. Goebel showed a quick responsiveness to the idea, but no definite action was taken.

O'Neal moved to request locals not to initiate referendums until after the Convention. The vote was 5 to 4, whereupon the 2 majority members changed their votes to make it 7 to 2. There was some sentiment for a complete ban against referendums, but this was rather too strong, so the Committee went no further than this "request."

There was some heckling about the right of members of N. E. C. to see the referendum votes, which were concluded this day, May 28th. It was finally ordered that the vote should be kept secret until the

report of the Investigating Committee is received. Elected to this Committee: Arnold (Milwaukee), Brandt (St. Louis), Branstetter (Chicago)—all of the Right Wing.

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Thursday, May 29th.

The Organization Department was abolished. Comrade Wagenknecht has been in charge of this Department for several months, and this was the method of getting rid of him, though Wagenknecht explained that he had intended to resign at this session.

Katterfeld drily commented that he would vote for this action as consistent with the other actions of the Committee. It is absurd to retain an Organization Department after the actions already taken.

The Amnesty Convention was postponed to September 15th, after Barnes, who has been employed to organize this affair, made his report.

Stedman appeared again to state that he was informed that the Executive Committee of the South Slavic Federation was opposed to the declarations of their Translator-Secretary. This was a pretty commentary on the action of the N. E. C., but the Committee decided not to open up its action until supplied with further information.

The further business of the Thursday and Friday sessions was the issuing of proclamations and a statement of the party stand. The original draft of this statement was by Hillquit, and the statement as adopted will be taken up in a special article.

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The closing sessions were marked by a lack of assurance on the part of the majority, with open admissions that the confidence of the minority for a Left Wing victory in the Convention, in spite of all expulsions, was warranted.

The record of this meeting of the N. E. C. constitutes of itself a complete case for the Left Wing movement within the party and the complete assurance of the winning of the party for the Socialism of social revolution.

The party revolution is won. The counter-revolution is on. Every Socialist who is conscious of the real issues involved in this party controversy will vote for the delegates to the Emergency Convention pledged to join the American party with the Communist International.

Party expulsions can no more kill the Socialism of the social revolution than the imprisonments, deportations and brutalities of our capitalist master class. The Left Wing speaks for the Socialism which is marching along with world history, while the party officialdom is still of those who make the proletarian oppression a game of political nothingness. The Left Wing must become the party.