

The National Left Wing Conference

THE Left Wing of the Socialist Party has unified and organized itself nationally. At its first National Conference, held in New York City starting June 21, the Left Wing was animated by a fundamental and unalterable determination to conquer the old Socialist Party for the revolutionary Socialism of the Communist International.

The most important issue before the Conference was whether a Communist Party should be immediately organized by the Conference, and the struggle in the Socialist Party now be abandoned or whether the fight should continue until the Emergency Convention. The Conference by a large majority decided to wage the struggle within the Party until September, in order to rally all the revolutionary elements for a Communist Party, meanwhile organizing, temporarily, as the Left Wing Section of the Socialist Party.

The Left Wing Conference was overwhelmingly a proletarian body. It was animated with a fine spirit of enthusiasm, which nothing could daunt. For four days the delegates labored over important problems; and the product of their labors was an organization basis and a theoretical formulation for a real party of revolutionary Socialism. It was a Bolshevik Conference, appreciating the vital necessity of a Bolshevik policy for the American proletariat. On the one hand, a fringe of Menshevik delegates were overwhelmingly beaten; and, on the other, a tendency toward Anarcho-Syndicalism met with absolutely no response. Theoretically and tactically, this Conference stands alone in the history of American Socialism.

The Conference was composed of over 90 delegates from 20 different states, coming overwhelmingly from large industrial centers, the heart of the militant proletarian movement, such as New York, Boston, Buffalo, Rochester, Philadelphia, Providence, Pittsburgh, Hartford, Chicago, Minneapolis, Duluth, St. Paul, Detroit, Kansas City, Denver, Cleveland and Oakland, Cal. The Left Wing has taken firm root in New England and the Pacific Coast, in the North-West and Middle West, in New Mexico, wherever the militant proletariat is in action. A letter was received from dozens of comrades "doing time" in Fort Leavenworth Prison, greeting the Conference as the inspiration of revolutionary Socialism.

Louis C. Fraina was elected temporary Chairman, and in his opening address sounded the keynote of the Conference:

"This Conference is an expression of the upsurge of revolutionary Socialism within the Party. The crisis in Capitalism has created a crisis in Socialism, and this crisis goes to the heart of our revolutionary problems. The proletarian revolution in action has modified the old tactical concepts of Socialism; and the inspiration of the Bolshevik conquests, joining with the original minority Socialism in the Socialist Party, has produced the Left Wing. In spite of a reactionary bureaucracy, revolutionary Socialism is conquering the Socialist Party, proclaiming that in spite of the dead policies of the past, it will lay the basis for a revolutionary Socialist movement. Our Socialism will conquer not only the masses in the party, but the proletarian masses outside the party. This Conference has an historic mission to perform, and it will perform it in accord with the militant traditions of revolutionary Socialism. Our task is not an immediate revolution; it is the task of organizing and preparing for the revolutionary struggle."

The Credentials Committee, consisting of

Max Cohen (N. Y.), J. Lasman (Mass.), Jack Carney (Duluth), A. Wagenknecht (Ohio) and J. Stillson (Chicago) proceeded to consider credentials. Pending their report various delegates spoke concerning conditions in their local movement. Zucker, of Kings Co., spoke in favor of the immediate organization of a Communist Party, after which the Chair urged that this particular problem be discussed when it actually should come before the Conference. John Reed, just returned from attendance at the A. F. of L. Convention, gave a satirical and critical sketch of the proceedings, indicting the A. F. of L. as a betrayer of the workers.

The report of the Credentials Committee recommended the seating of 66 delegates from 14 states (other delegates being seated at sub-



The Upsurge of Socialism

sequent sessions) but split on the question of seating 15 delegates representing the Central Committees of the Russian, Polish, Lettish, Ukrainian, Estonian, Lithuanian and South Slavic Federations. The majority recommended seating them as full delegates. Max Cohen, as the minority, opposed this, arguing that the Federations were already adequately represented through regular delegates they elected or participated in electing, and that seating delegates from the Central Committees meant duplicate representation. The majority report was accepted.

With the adoption of the Credentials Committee's report Fraina vacated the chair, and William Bross Lloyd of Chicago was elected permanent Chairman, A. Renner of Detroit Vice-Chairman, Fannie Horowitz of New York permanent secretary, and Rosenthal of Philadelphia assistant secretary. Committees were then elected as follows:

Manifesto and Program: Fraina (Boston), Batt (Detroit), Stocklitzky (Chicago), Ruthenberg (Cleveland) and Ferguson (Chicago).

Organization, Finance and Press: Cohen (N. Y.), Wagenknecht (Ohio), N. I. Hourwich (N. Y.), E. Lindgren (Brooklyn), MacAlpine (New York).

Labor Committee: John Reed (N. Y.), Ben Gitlow (Bronx), A. Anderson (Boston), Carney (Duluth) and Jurgis (Boston).

Resolutions: John Ballam (Boston), Bross Lloyd (Chicago), Tywerowsky (N. Y.), Maurin (Boston) and Stillson (Chicago).

At the second session, Sunday afternoon, the Committee on Manifesto and Program reported. It was recommended to the Conference that the approval of the Manifesto be left to

the National Council, and that only the Program be considered. After a discussion, in which the Communist Party again interjected itself, this procedure was adopted. Ferguson then read the Program on behalf of the Committee, which was considered point by point. It was in two parts—one the Communist Program, consisting of a summary of the Bolshevik Call for an International Communist Congress and of the Manifesto and Program of the Communist International; the other a Program devoted to the program of the Left Wing. An interesting discussion took place, particularly on mass action; Batt of Detroit opposed the Committee's report on mass action, arguing that the term mass action should be qualified by the word political, while Fraina answering on behalf of the Committee, argued that mass action, while it develops non-politically under the impulse of concentrated industry, acquires a political character as it comes in conflict with the bourgeois state, mass action being not alone the tactics of the immediate struggle, but equally the final tactics of the social revolution.

In the discussion of the report of the Committee on Manifesto and Program, the issue of the immediate organization of a Communist Party was again interjected. This interjection of the Communist Party issue interfered with the transaction of business; realizing which, the Conference decided to suspend the regular order of business and proceed with the report of the Organization Committee. The majority of the Organization Committee reported in favor of the Conference organizing as the Left Wing Section of the American Socialist Party, that a National Council of nine members should be elected to compose the executive organ of the Left Wing Section, and that *The Revolutionary Age* (to be combined with the *New York Communist*), should become the national organ. The majority further reported in favor of carrying on the fight within the Party for the coming two months; that all Left Wing locals and states, including those expelled or suspended, should elect delegates to the Emergency Convention of the Socialist Party to be held at Chicago, August 30; and that if all delegates are not seated, including delegates of suspended organizations, the Left Wing delegates shall secede and organize a new Communist Party. The minority, consisting of Nicholas I. Hourwich, reported in favor of the immediate organization of a Communist Party.

All Sunday evening was given to this discussion. Fraina raised a point of order that the minority report in favor of immediately organizing a Communist Party was out of order, on the ground that it was in conflict with the Call of Local Boston, Local Cleveland and the Left Wing Section of New York City, on the basis of which the Conference met. The Chair ruled the point of order well taken, and the minority report not before the house. An appeal was taken from this decision, resulting in a vote of 42 to 42, which sustained the chair. MacAlpine thereupon moved, seconded by Fraina, a suspension of the rules in order to discuss the immediate organization of a new party. Larkin amended that Hourwich, representing those favoring an immediate Communist Party, and C. E. Ruthenberg, representing those favoring the other view, be empowered to draw up a joint resolution around which the discussion could center. The resolution was as follows:

"Resolved, that the Left Wing Conference