

Report of the National Left Wing Conference

First Session, June 21st, 1919

Opening Address

Meeting was called to order at 2:30 p. m. Maximilian Cohen presiding.

Mr. Fraina was elected temporary chairman.

Chairman: Left Wing Comrades of the Socialist Party: I think all of us realize that this conference is laying the basis for a new revolutionary Socialist movement in the United States. I think all of us realize that the tasks of this conference are tasks that are going to determine the future of the movement in this country. And the conditions that have brought this conference into being are conditions of crisis in Capitalism—conditions of crisis in Capitalism that have not only produced critical conditions in the life of Capitalism itself, but have equally produced conditions of crisis in the international Socialist movement, and in our own American Socialist movement.

We have met here this afternoon in answer to a mass impulse within the Socialist Party—a mass impulse that is trying to transform the Socialist Party into a revolutionary party of Socialism—a movement that is trying to square Socialism, not with passive, hesitant, compromising theory of ultra-Socialism and of the ultra conditions of Capitalism, but with the new militant conception of revolutionary Socialism of the proletarian struggle against Capitalism. We have been told by our opponents in the Socialist Party that it is just an isolated movement—that this Left Wing is not something that has its roots deep within life itself—that it is simply an emotional expression of the proletarian revolutions in Europe. It is true that the proletarian revolution in Europe is a vital contributing factor toward the development of the Left Wing movement in the American Socialist Party. But it has been a factor in developing this Left Wing movement in that it is proven by the actual test of the revolution that the concepts of the Left Wing within the American Socialist Party—a Left Wing that was not born today or the day before, but which has always been the militant "left"—the militant minority of the American movement that their concepts of revolutionary action have been proven correct by the experience of the proletarian revolution.

So that we don't have to base this movement of ours simply upon European events. We can base this movement of ours upon events within the American Socialist movement itself. We can say that the Left Wing of today is the child of the Left Wing of yesterday which has been given an experience, which has been given a new courage, and a new militant insight into its problem by the Communists of the revolutionary proletariat in Europe.

And so, comrades, we are met here this afternoon for two purposes—or rather, our task is a dual task. On the one hand, it is to crush the moderate Socialism within the American movement, by trying to conquer the Socialist Party for revolutionary Socialism. And we are also met to lay down here this afternoon not only a basis for this conquest of the Socialist Party but a basis for a new militant revolutionary party, for a party that can function either as the Socialist Party or as a party independent of the existing Socialist Party, if conditions compel us to realize that task.

And this party of ours is going to join hands with revolutionary Socialism the world over. It is going to do its task in accordance with the spirit and the tactics of revolutionary Socialism. It is going to do what it can in accord with its own conditions and its available

Owing to the fact that it is impossible to get out the complete stenographic report of the proceedings of the National Left Wing Conference, June 21-25, in booklet form in the short time at our disposal, it has been decided to run extracts from the report dealing with the matters now under dispute. It is proposed to give such extracts as will state the position of both sides and will throw all possible clarity on the issues involved.

forces to express revolutionary Socialism in the policy and the practice of the Socialist movement. And this does not mean, as the Right Wing within the party tries to insinuate, that we necessarily must have immediate revolution. We are simply trying to prepare ourselves for the day when the revolution shall come.

The test of revolutionary Socialism is not simply an immediate revolution. The test of revolutionary Socialism is in its policy during the actual struggles of the proletariat at all times, under all conditions in the struggle against Capitalism and the ruling class, and we can express the tactics and the principle of revolutionary Socialism just as well in ordinary times, just as well in pre-revolutionary times, as we can during the stress and turmoil of the revolution itself. And as a matter of fact, this revolutionary policy of ours, by impregnating the proletariat with the consciousness of militant action, is preparing the proletariat and ourselves as well for the final struggle against Capitalism—a preparation which is necessary because unless you have that preparation, unless the movement develops that revolutionary consciousness out of the actual struggle, the immediate struggle of the proletariat, when the day of the revolution does come, we shall find the movement lined up with the counter-revolution against the Socialist proletariat.

So, comrades, I don't think that we have to elaborate upon this thesis. I know that we are going to face this task in a spirit of revolutionary Socialism, and of revolutionary reality. I know that we are going to lay a basis here for a movement that is going to engage in the militant struggle against Capitalism. Because behind this conference is not simply the masses within the Socialist Party that have sent you here in order to realize their concept of revolutionary Socialism, but behind these masses within the party are the proletarian masses that are anxious to get the call of militant struggle against Capitalism, in order to realize the coming of the Socialist republic. And the spirit of this conference, the spirit of the delegates here assembled, the spirit of the masses in the Party behind this conference, is the spirit of the Communist International which calls upon the proletariat of the world to prepare itself for the final revolutionary struggle against Capitalism. (Applause.)

Preliminary Reports

The Chairman:

There being nothing before the house, comrades, I wonder whether it would be a good idea to fill in the time, I think it would be a good idea, as the Credentials Committee will take probably half an hour or so to get its report—it might be a good idea to have some of the comrades from the various parts of the country make reports upon the condition of

the movement in their section, short five-minute speeches.

Mr. MacAlpine: I make a motion that we listen to the State Secretary of the Socialist Party of Michigan.

Mr. Batt: He is not here. But I am secretary of the Ways and Means Committee of the Socialist Party of Michigan, and might acquaint you with the situation.

Of course, there is nobody here that is not aware of the details of the activity of the National Executive Committee in expelling the Socialist Party of Michigan, and suspending the various language federations, in all approximately forty thousand members of the Socialist Party. The State Secretary of the Socialist Party of Michigan went over to Chicago to verify the reports that we have received unofficially as to the expulsion of the State of Michigan. And as a means of dealing with the issue, he called a special emergency convention of the Socialist Party of Michigan, which met last Sunday in the House of Masses, Detroit, to consider what would be the future activity of the Socialist Party of Michigan in reference to the Socialist Party of America and the general Socialist movement in this country. We have a peculiar condition in Michigan that does not exist in any other organized group of Socialists in the United States. The Left Wing program that you brought up and that has been endorsed, I dare say, over 50 per cent—yes, 75 per cent of the delegates here this afternoon, represent organizations that have only adopted that program in the last few months. I point out the fact that the Socialist Party of Michigan has been carrying on its propaganda on a non-reformistic basis since 1914. For the last five years, the so-called "left" element has had control of the Socialist Party of Michigan. There has been no reform propaganda carried on officially by the Socialist Party of Michigan in that number of years. We have concentrated our activity upon pointing out to the working class the necessity of seizing control of the political state and establishing a workers' government, generally called the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. And when we convened last Sunday afternoon there was no question of altering our position one iota. We never considered for one moment the proposition of apologizing to the National Executive Committee and reversing our stand upon the reform amendment that we placed in our constitution. That was not even considered by the convention. It was moved by the Finnish Translator-Secretary in the name of the Finnish delegates to the convention that we do that kind of a thing, and the convention hooted him off the floor. They would not listen to him.

The questions that we considered there last Sunday are the questions that the comrades are going to have to consider here. The National Executive Committee has demonstrated its reactionary tendencies by expelling from the Socialist Party of America forty thousand members—practically expelling them—suspending some and expelling others. If I know anything about yellow Socialists—if I have learned anything by the past activity of yellow Socialists both in the American movement and in the different European movements, there is no step too degrading, too contemptible, too miserably mean for the Executive Committee to take in order to maintain their control of the Socialist Party of America. (Applause.)

I warn you here, and I warn you now that the National Executive Committee of the So-