

# The Detroit Convention of the Socialist Party

By J. LOUIS ENGDAHL

Secretary, Committee for the Third International of the Socialist Party

It is now two years since the forced exodus from the Socialist Party began. During that time the party has dwindled from a powerful organization, attacked by all the organs of American capitalism and applauded by the advanced guard of America's workers, until now it is a mere skeleton, almost ignored by friend and foe alike.

Under the circumstances one would think that the officialdom of the party would be busying itself with gathering together the broken remnants, with trying to build anew to meet the problems of the present and the future. It would be the natural conclusion, after considering the party's condition, that that should be the aim and purpose of the party's annual national convention to be held this year at Detroit, Michigan, starting Saturday, June 25th.

But such is not the case. The outstanding feature of the convention agenda, just published in the "Socialist World," official monthly of the party, tells a different story. More members of the party are to be expelled, more organizations are to be shattered, if not voluntarily, then under the direction of the National Executive Committee. This is the meaning of the resolution placed on the Convention agenda as follows:

"Whereas, the Communist International is attempting to disrupt and destroy the Socialist Party of the United States as evidenced by numerous declarations to that effect, and

"Whereas, in their reply to the application of our party for affiliation they make the following appeal to their sympathizers among our membership:

"Workers: Leave the American Socialist Party. It is your enemy and ours. Already in America there is a revolutionary party, the United Communist Party, the American Section of the Communist International. These are our true comrades. Thousands of them have suffered for the revolution. This is the party of the revolutionary working class. JOIN THE UNITED COMMUNIST PARTY!"

"And, Whereas, those of our membership who are honestly in accord with the Communist International and who accept its conditions and dictation will, in response to the above appeal, either withdraw and join the United Communist Party or will remain in our party only for the purpose of creating dissension and attempting to destroy our organization,

"And, Whereas, it is our duty to protect our party against such treachery on the part of the unprincipled and unscrupulous members serving the interests of either the Communist International or the Department of Justice, and in either case serving the interests of the American capitalists;

"Therefore, Be It Resolved, that until such time as the Communist International has officially withdrawn the above appeal and others of a similar import, members of the Socialist Party supporting or endorsing the Communist International or advocating affiliation therewith, shall be subject to expulsion by their respective branches. And be it further

"Resolved, that the National Executive Committee be instructed to enforce this decision."

The above resolution was written by Otto Branstetter, the present national executive secretary of the party. He introduced it in his branch, the 13th Ward Branch (Chicago) and secured its acceptance there.

Instead of first submitting it to the Chicago organization for its consideration, as all the other branches had done, Branstetter put the heresy-hunting document in his pocket and took it along with him to the March meeting of the National Executive Committee, in Boston, Mass., that prepared the convention agenda for publication. He then secured its insertion in the agenda.

In a discussion of this resolution appearing in the "Chicago Socialist," Branstetter declares:

"So far as my position is concerned, I am for the adoption of the resolution. I introduced it in my ward branch and I am glad of it."

A similar resolution was originated in the 7th Ward Branch (Chicago), of which Seymour Stedman is a member. It urged that the National Executive Committee refuse to seat any delegate at the Detroit Convention who avows his intention to favor the acceptance of the terms laid down by the Third International, or to seat any delegate so instructed. It arrived after the March National Executive Committee meeting had adjourned.

It is a peculiar fact that this very important Branstetter resolution received but a line or two in the official party press service as sent from Boston. It is also peculiar that instead of publishing the convention agenda in March, following the meeting of the national executive committee, its publication was delayed more than two months until late in May.

During those two months the delegates were being elected to the Detroit Convention. Believers in the Third International were charged with trying to split the party. Candidates for delegates who declared themselves for the principles of the Russian Revolution were attacked as disrupters. And during all that time the National Executive Committee had a card up its sleeve that said: "Expel all believers in 'The Third'."

These comrades are not to be expelled for unconditional faith in the "21 Points." They are to be thrown out of the party not only for "supporting or endorsing the Communist International, but even for "advocating affiliation" with it.

Perhaps the climax of this perfidy to the world's working class is contained in the declaration that:

"It is our duty to protect our party against such treachery on the part of the unprincipled and unscrupulous members serving the interests of either the Communist International or the Department of Justice, and in either case serving the interests of the American capitalists."

What a ghastly charge, that the Third International, springing to life out of the agonies of the Russian Revolution, serves the purposes of American capitalism, through inspiring its adherents in this country. Yet that charge is written down by men who call themselves "Socialists." And it is offered for serious consideration to a Socialist Party National Convention. Its utter mendacity will defeat itself, if not in the convention, then before the party membership.

It can very plainly be seen that, through this resolution, the party's national executive committee itself becomes the staunch ally of the department of justice. It sets before itself the task of signaling out every Third Internationalist in the party. Expulsion from the party easily becomes the basis for a court prosecution and conviction, and there is then short shift from party membership to membership in some state prison or federal bastille. All with the aid of a party executive committee that has voluntarily converted itself into a Capitalist Extraordinary Commission for the Suppression of Bolshevism in America.

The backbone of this unique proposition, contrary to anything even suggested by any other working class political party in the world, is a paragraph from a statement, the authenticity of which has never been established, which is supposed to have been issued by the Executive Committee of the Third International, following the 1920 Convention of the Party in New York City.

During all of its nearly two years in office, the present national executive committee has never been in official communication with the officials of the Third International. The statement of affiliation rejected by the September, 1919, Party Convention, but approved by the membership, reached Moscow nearly a year later, and then only through a "visitor" to the Soviet Republic who was imprisoned for counter-revolutionary activities.

The 1920 (New York) Convention elected and instructed a delegation to go to Soviet Russia as the official representatives of the party. The members of the delegation applied for and received their passports. But they never started the journey.

The Party National Executive Committee, therefore, has seized upon an alleged condition, which it refuses to investigate, in order to find the basis for expulsion of party members supporting or endorsing or advocating affiliation with the Third International.

This means handing over large numbers of the party membership to the federal authorities. It means converting the American Socialist Party into the only 100 per cent anti-Third International Party on earth. Very apparently, the national executive committee wishes to convert the Detroit Convention into the funeral of the Socialist Party of the United States.

The present national executive committee may urge the alibi that it does not stand back of the Branstetter resolution. But Branstetter, as national secretary of the party, is the creature of the executive committee, and the circumstances under which the Branstetter resolution was inserted in the Convention Agenda, no opportunity being offered for a contrary proposition, are so extraordinary that the executive committee must accept full sponsorship for it.

This is the same national executive committee and national secretary that did not raise a finger when Victor L. Berger came out in his Milwaukee Leader urging working-class voters to cast their ballots for a non-Socialist candidate for judge at the April elections.

Neither has it said a word about the policy adopted by the Oklahoma Leader, an alleged Socialist daily, that has declared itself for "independent political action," which means support of the Nonpartisan League, the Farmer-Labor Party, or any other fly-by-night organization that may loom over the horizon.

Neither has it a word to say about the campaign to raise funds for a St. Louis daily to "champion . . . independent political action," although party members are using party forces and party prestige to build a publication that may betray the party on the morrow.

It is to the left that the Branstetter resolution turns in hunting down radicals, never to the right to watch the forces that turn traitor to the party with impunity.

## From the Italian Front

BY CLARA WOLD

Milano, May, 1921.

According to Serrati, if the socialist party gets by the shoals of "collaborismo" the Socialists of Italy will go to power and will take over the parliamentary government across the new election.

There is unquestionable, however, a strong section of the party holding out for collaboration with the bourgeois government—as many as half the strength of the party, perhaps. Never with Giolitti to be sure, but possibly with his successor. There is no question that the success of the Socialist Party in electing practically its old quota of parliamentarians in the face of a white reaction as bitter as that just gone through, is one of the out-standing events of recent proletarian history.

Italy's bourgeois press finds slim comfort after all in the fact that the Reds lost only 17 or 18 seats—at least twelve of these were lost because Fascisti at the point of guns prevented workingmen from voting—when the first expectation was that they would lose

at least one hundred. Rather dismally it notes that the only result of arousing Rome, the government seat, to go to the polls was to increase the Red vote. In less than two years the Socialist vote changed from 12,081 to 15,727. Add to this the Communist vote and the figures mount to 19,664, making the entire socialist vote almost double what it was in Rome in 1919.

A little more cheerfully the press comments on the apparent defeat of the Communists and the support of the less red program of the Socialists. In Torino, the strongest center of Communism, the Communist lost heavily. It must be remembered, however, that thousands of workingmen abstained from voting.

While the bourgeois press, a little gloomily, munches over the statement that Constitutionalists can rejoice in the knowledge that the Right Socialists—"the peace-abiding, unrevolutionary, sane Socialists," if you please—won in preference to the Communists, everyone else is celebrating a "notevale vittoria." Not-