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# Minutes of the Founding Convention of the Proletarian Party of America: Detroit, MI — June 27-29, 1920

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## [First Day, June 27, 1920.]

Meeting was called to order at 10:00 AM Sunday, June 27th, 1920 at Proletarian Hall, #174 Michigan Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

Comrade Batt, as State Secretary, gave an outline of the history of previous organizations and of the activities of the Michigan group in general in the past and what they would be expected to do in the future, after which Comrade Talbott of Flint was unanimously elected temporary Chairman of the Convention with Bessie E. Davies of Bay City as temporary Secretary.

It was suggested by Comrade Batt, and agreed to by the entire delegation, that certain comrades, particularly those from towns that had no delegate or where the regularly accredited delegate did not object, be seated as fraternal delegates. The same action was taken in regard to members of the State Executive Committee. These delegates could act in committees and could have a voice but no vote.

Motion was made by Teal of Grand Rapids that a Credentials Committee of three be elected. This committee consisted of Krispenz of Detroit, Thomas Davies of Bay City, and Ector of Rochester.

It was suggested by Earley, he being a fraternal delegate, that any delegates known to be delegates who came in too late to come before the Credentials Committee should be considered seated. This suggestion was acted on favorably. Meeting at this time was given recess of 15 minutes to give the Credentials Committee time to do their work.

The Credentials Committee reported the following delegates as seated:

William Resseguie of Grand Ledge  
[A.J.] McGregor of Chicago  
D.E. Earley of Benton Harbor  
Hymon Achter, Sam Essman of Rochester, NY  
Teal of Grand Rapids  
Thomas J. Davies of Bay City  
[Carl] Talbott of Flint  
Jacobiak of Jackson  
Edith Atkins of Ann Arbor  
William Krispenz of Detroit

*Fraternal Delegates:*

John Keracher of Detroit  
O.C. Johnson of Ann Arbor  
Cole of Jackson

There being no delegates preset from Grand Ledge and Benton Harbor and there being small active groups in both places, it was suggested by the Credentials Committee that Comrade Early and Comrade Resseguie be seated as regular delegates and votes of all delegates shall be one delegate, one vote regardless of membership represented. On suggestion of Teal of Grand Rapids, Bosler of Grand Rapids was seated as a fraternal delegate.

Moved by Davies, seconded by Krispenz that delegates be seated as reported. *Carried.*

It was decided that the Convention go into Committee of the Whole to draw up form and order of business.

Comrade McGregor of Chicago notified the convention that the Chicago comrades doubted the advisability of forming a political party at this time and that he was instructed to ask that this matter be brought up for discussion before the convention. Motion by Davies, seconded by Krispenz, that the objections made by the Chicago comrades and the discussion asked for be made the first order of business. This motion was ruled out of order as a matter of this kind could not be properly a first order of business.

Motion by Teal, seconded by Kispens, that temporary Chairman and Secretary be made permanent. *Carried.*

On motion by one of the Rochester delegates, seconded by Comrade Atkins, roll call of delegates and report by each on the condition of his locality was made first order of business.

Ressenguie of Grand Ledge reports a local of about 5 active members that will line up with the new organization. this number or possibly 6 can be counted on.

McGregor of Chicago reports that the Proletarian Club at that place has between 25 and 30 members, mostly recruited from the old YPSL, which is practically dead in Chicago. In addition to this there are about 12 groups in Chicago, but the only group that amounts to anything either in strength or clarity is the Proletarian Club. They have conducted four study classes all winter and have two this summer, hold two street meetings each week and expect to have more soon. A new group has now been formed composed of much the same element as composes the Proletarian Club but has no party affiliations and is known as the Workers Social and Educational Club. On the grounds that we can do better work as educational clubs than as an organized political party, the Chicago group bases its objection to the formation of a political party at this time. They do not see the necessity for it and because the other parties have failed think this also will fail. On the whole from a general standpoint the situation in Chicago is considered good.

Earley of Benton Harbor reports a class of 6 or 7 and a number on the outside that are ready to help to do something in this line of work. He also reports that Benton Harbor is in favor of a new political party as it will be definite and something to stand by.

Esman of Rochester reports that they had a membership in the Socialist Party two years ago including the foreign branches of about 2,000. This has been reduced to about 200 dues paying members. This membership after carrying on propaganda along strictly Marxian lines polled 6,000 votes at the last election for their candidates without doing anything outside of their Marxian propaganda to catch votes. They have large crowds at their meetings, hold seven classes per week with from 10 to 30 in attendance. There is no strictly political organization in Rochester at this time. They see the need of a political party as they cannot throw their support either to the old so-called Socialist Party nor to any of the Communist parties as these parties

have no definite program and do not themselves know what they want. The Rochester comrades intend to start a political party and are only waiting to see what is done by the Detroit Convention as they have been notified by their Chief of Police that no propaganda will be permitted excepting by a regularly organized political party.

Teal of Grand Rapids reports that up to last October [1919] they had a nice local consisting of seven branches. In October the American Legion raids on foreign branches started, which continued until the big raids in January [1920]. No raids were made on American comrades but they completely broke up the foreign speaking branches. Study classes which had formerly been held were given up on account of small attendance. Since the raids the study classes and meetings have been held in homes. There was no attempt made to run for political office but Grand Rapids is ready to line up with a political party that is strictly scientific and along Marxian lines.

Davies of Bay City reports conditions in Bay City much as in other cities, local small as it has been in recent years until now but 6 members are left who are active. Local has been meeting in homes since January raids. Held study classes last winter and held the members together in this way. Although it seems that conditions are not ripe for a successful political party, Bay City is of the opinion that it will be a nucleus for the future and will line up with either an educational or Marxian political party.

Talbott of Flint reports that the local since the raids has been small and they have only kept together. The English speaking element since the raids has remained together but the foreign element has drifted away. Study classes have been held and by fall they expect to be in a position to furnish 3 or 4 teachers. As there is no political party in existence which the Flint comrades can support there is therefore room for one as they must be active and expect to line up with the new party if the Manifesto, etc. meets with their approval.

Jacobiak of Jackson reports that in spite of the fact that Jackson had always been thought to have a clear movement that such is not the case, therefore the group he represents is small. Study classes have been held by 7 or 8 members every Wednesday but are not formally organized as a branch but will affiliate with a new party as soon as proper Manifesto, etc. is drawn up.

Atkins of Ann Arbor reports that conditions there are poor on account of inactivity of both workers and radicals for different reasons although a radical sentiment prevails among the working class. The

local is affiliated with the Proletarian University, has held classes and had lectures and hopes to have a lecture course next year.

Krispenz of Detroit reports that Detroit has been running on flat tires since the raids but has not stopped running. They have been conducting study classes and generally preparing the comrades to join the Proletarian Party. The local of Detroit consists of about 60 members.

Teal of Grand Rapids further reports that there are about 14 members that will join the new party in that city.

Keracher reports as unofficial organizer and states that a fairly accurate report has been made by the delegates on conditions as he found them. He states that conditions in the small towns are normal as large locals could not be expected in small towns but finds conditions bad in large towns, particularly in Cleveland where confusion is at its worst, and does not expect Cleveland to line up at present but thinks that something will be done there later. He finds Chicago ripe for a movement of this kind and reports Buffalo with a good local of 30 members. He finds that no party at present expresses the revolutionary requirements of the American proletariat and as the organization of each country should express the requirements of that country, an American organization must express the requirements of the American working class. The party that does this in America will live no matter how small it is, if it has brains enough to reach the workers with Marxian education. The conditions are such that Comrade Keracher is confident that we can soon have small locals from coast to coast. Big locals at present are not only undesirable but even dangerous as they are unwieldy.

Johnson as fraternal delegate reports that he thinks that there is now a place for a scientific party. He is of the opinion that most proclamations and manifestos have little logic and a great deal of declamation, which we must get away from in this organization. It is all right to have sentiment in its place but reason must be used as well as sentiment.

McGregor was again given the floor and explained that the speed with which things were happening internationally gave us little time to develop a new party and also that another party was likely to develop sectarianism as others had done before and would keep us away from the workers rather than bringing us in closer touch with them. After much discussion it was understood that if the party did not de-

velop such features as they objected to, Chicago would be ready to affiliate.

Moved by delegate from Rochester, seconded by Krispenz of Detroit that we proceed to organize a party. *Carried.*

Moved by Davies of Bay City, seconded by Earley of Benton Harbor that we elect committee of five to draft Manifesto and Platform to bring back to the convention. *Carried.*

Nominations for this committee were as follows:

Esman of Rochester  
Keracher of Detroit  
Batt of Detroit  
Earley of Benton Harbor  
Davies of Bay City  
McGregor of Chicago  
Teal of Grand Rapids  
Achter of Rochester  
Johnson of Ann Arbor

Davies, Batt, Earley, and Teal declined, leaving the required five who were elected by acclamation on motion by Teal, seconded by McGregor.

Moved by Earley, seconded by Krispenz that a committee of five be elected to draw up Constitution and structure of organization. Batt, Earley, Davies, Teal, Krispenz, Bosler, and Coal were nominated and as Batt declined the former motion was reconsidered and it was moved and seconded that the committee consist of seven. This motion carried and Comrade Ressenguie was elected to fill the vacancy.

On motion adjourned at 1:10 PM to reconvene at 7:00 o'clock.

B.E. Davis, Secretary

Meeting called to order at 7:45.

First order of business: report of Committee on Manifesto and Platform. Report read by Johnson of Ann Arbor. On motion the

whole report was read through to be taken up at a later reading seriatim. After the first reading of this report it was decided, as some of the comrades would have to leave for home after this session the next order of business would be the first reading of the report of the Committee on Constitution and Party Construction. This report was read by T.J. Davies of Bay City.

Moved by Davies, seconded by Teal that we proceed to take up Manifesto and Program seriatim. *Carried.*

Moved by Davies, seconded by Teal that Manifesto of Proletarian Party be adopted as read. It appears at this time that as the Constitution has not been acted on, and as one clause of this deals with the matter of the name of the party, the motion is not in order and is withdrawn by the mover with the consent of the second.

Moved by Davies, seconded by Teal as substitute motion that action on the Manifesto be deferred until such time as name is decided on. *Carried.*

Moved by Earley, seconded by Davies that we proceed to select permanent name for the party. *Carried.*

Moved by Davies, seconded by Teal that this organization be known as the Proletarian Party of America. After much discussion mainly as to the desirability of brevity also as to desirability of making the name express the purposes of the party, *the motion carried.*

Moved by Davies, seconded by Bosler that manifesto be known as the Manifesto of the Proletarian Party of America. *Carried.*

Moved by Davies, seconded by Earley that first paragraph be adopted as read. As this would be a cumbersome method and take up much time if each paragraph were to be acted on in this way, McGregor offered an amendment to the effect that each paragraph be adopted as read provided no objection was made to it by any delegate present. *Amendment carried.* Clause 2 and 3 were adopted in this way.

Clause 4. Moved by McGregor, seconded by Davies that the word "conscious" be stricken out. There was much discussion on this point with the result that the motion was lost and the clause was adopted as read.

Clause 5, 6, and 7 were adopted without discussion.

The Manifesto and Program, after having been read and adopted clause by clause with the understanding that some slight changes and additions would be made at the next meeting, motion was made to adjourn. Meeting was adjourned at 11:15 [PM] to reconvene at 10:00 at the House of the Masses, Monday morning, June 28th, 1920.

B.E. Davis, Secretary

### **[Second Day, June 28, 1920.]**

On account of unfinished work of committees the morning session of June 28th was not called to order but was postponed until the afternoon.

Meeting was called to order at 2:15 [PM]. Section C of the Platform, dealing with party activity and organization was made the first order of business. This section was adopted as read, with some minor changes.

Section D, on tactics, was also adopted as read. The addition of a special clause, "The Task Before Us," which was left over from a previous meeting was taken up at this time and was adopted as read. The committee reports at this time that their work is finished with the exception of a short declaration of principles.

Moved by Davies, seconded by Bostelaar that the Manifesto and Platform be adopted as a whole. *Carried.*

Constitution Committee notifies the convention that they are prepared to give completed report. Davies gives final reading with the exception of the article referring to name, which was acted on at a previous meeting.

All articles were adopted as read with a few exceptions. Article 8, Section 2, concerning membership dues and initiation fees, was adopted with the understanding that locals already in existence and affiliated with the Proletarian Party at its birth will not be required to pay the initiation fee for its members.

Moved by Davies, seconded by Krispenz that the section dealing with charter fee be abolished. *Carried.*

The section dealing with expulsion of locals by the National Executive Committee was amended to provide for the appeal of locals away from the findings of the National Executive Committee to the National Convention.

The matter of foreign locals, after a great deal of discussion which it was found could not be concluded satisfactorily in the space of time that the convention still had, on motion by Davies, seconded by Keracher, was left to be taken care of by the National Executive Committee, subject to the referendum of the whole party. *Carried.*

At 5:30 it was realized that a night session would be necessary if we were to finish the work before the convention so it was decided to adjourn at 6:00 to reconvene at 7:00.

Article 11, Section 5 was stricken out and the article in this section dealing with the YPSL was stricken out as not being matter for the Constitution and will be taken care of in some other document. The committee brought in a majority and minority report on the party press. Moved by Earley, seconded by Davies that majority report be adopted. Carried by show of hands two to one.

*The Proletarian* was decided on as the official organ of the party by unanimous vote. The section dealing with organizers was adopted as read. The clause on literature was stricken out and a clause inserted in the Platform to take care of this matter. Meeting adjourned at 6:20 to reconvene at 7:00.

Evening session was called to order at 7:25 .

Election of National Executive and National Secretary-Treasurer being special order of business and was first order of business.

Nominations were as follows for National Executive Committee:

Davies of Bay City  
Essman of Rochester  
Teal of Grand Rapids  
Earley of Benton Harbor  
Keracher of Detroit  
McGregor of Chicago  
Renner of Detroit  
Johnson of Ann Arbor

Cole of Jackson  
Achter of Rochester  
O'Brien of Rochester  
Talber of Flint  
Bostelaar of Grand Rapids  
Peterson of Buffalo

Davies, Keracher, Achter declined.

Those elected were as follows:

Essman of Rochester  
McGregor of Chicago  
Renner of Detroit  
Johnson of Ann Arbor  
O'Brien of Rochester  
Talbot of Flint  
Peterson of Buffalo

with the following alternates in order named:

Earley of Benton Harbor  
Teal of Grand Rapids  
Cole of Jackson  
Bostelaar of Grand Rapids

Nominations for National Secretary were as follows:

Keracher of Detroit  
Batt [of Detroit]  
Earley of Benton Harbor  
B.E. Davies of Bay City

All declined with the exception of Batt and he was unanimously elected by show of hands.

There being one or two small items that had been deferred on account of Constitution Committee not having worked them out completely, these were taken up for action... [A] new clause was added that all members must provide themselves with copy of Mani-

festos, Constitution, and Program of the party and familiarize themselves with them.

The above was made a motion by Jacobiak, seconded by Earley. *Carried.*

Moved by Davies, seconded by Jacobiak that the convention adopt the Constitution as whole. *Carried.*

Moved by Jacobiak, seconded by McGregor that the Committee on Constitution be discharged. *Carried.*

Next order of business was re-reading of Manifesto, as revised.

Moved by Achter, seconded by Davies that Manifesto be adopted as a whole and the matter of the Declaration of Principles be left to the Executive Committee to take care of, to be referred to the Convention if it was still in session. *Carried.*

Essman of Rochester brought in resolution in the matter of YPSL, which will appear at the end of these minutes.

The next matter to come before the convention was the question of the party paper and it was decided that this should be started as soon as possible, and ways and means to accomplish this was left to the Executive Committee.

In connection with the matter of the paper it was pointed out by Comrade Keracher that to his own knowledge there would be considerable financial support given to the paper throughout the country.

Moved by Essman that there shall be no official connection between the party and the Proletarian University but members are urged to participate in the work of the Proletarian University. This motion was seconded by Earley.

Substitute motion by McGregor, seconded by Essman that the Executive Committee of the Party be instructed to confer with the Executive Committee of the Proletarian University for the purpose of defining the relations of the two organizations. *Carried.*

Moved by Davies, seconded by Early that this convention adjourn to convene at 9:00 o'clock Tuesday morning, June 29th, 1920.

Meeting adjourned at 10:30.

**[Third Day, June 29, 1920.]**

Meeting called to order at 10:00 o'clock Tuesday morning [June 29, 1920].

Moved by Earley, seconded by McGregor that matter of printing of the documents of the convention be first order of business.

Moved by Davies, seconded by McGregor that National Executive Committee be instructed to get out the documents of the convention together with ballots on same at the earliest date possible.  
*Carried.*

Declaration of Principles as roughly drawn up was read by Comrade Keracher with the understanding that grammatical errors, etc. will be taken care of by the committee. With this understanding the convention decided this was a declaration that the rank and file would be willing to stand by.

On motion by Davies, seconded by Earley Convention stands adjourned at 10:35, subject to the call of the National Executive Committee.

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**Resolution on YPSL.**

The Proletarian Party of America recognizes the need for the education of the youth of the working class in scientific Socialism. It therefore urges the Independent Young People's Socialist League to conduct educational work among its membership and among the proletariat as a whole in the form of classes and lectures and offers its help and cooperation to that end.

*Resolution adopted at the convention of the Proletarian Party of America.*

*Edited by Tim Davenport*

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