
Socialist Party Convention.

by Emma Denney

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CHICAGO, ILL., Aug. 30. — The Socialist Party, or what is known as the Right Wing of the Socialist Party, called its convention to order this morning after staging a fiasco in which Right Wingers, Left Wingers, and the police force all took a hand.

About 9 am Saturday, Aug. 30, the delegates began to arrive from all states of the union; about 180 all told. The convention was held at Machinist Hall, 113 S. Ashland Ave. The Left Wing had headquarters in the same building, downstairs, while the Right Wing convention was held on the second floor. The delegates, press reporters, and spectators assembled in the convention hall expecting the meeting to be called to order at 10 am. The committee in charge decided to clear the hall and admit only those delegates whose credentials had not been contested and whose membership cards were stamped up-to-date.

A Left Winger by the name of [John] Reed refused to leave the hall when requested to do so by [Julius] Gerber of New York, protesting that he was a duly elected delegate and entitled to remain. Gerber tried a little physical force to eject him from the room and several other “Lefts” came to his rescue, with the result that the policemen who were standing in groups of 6 or 8 all along the block rushed in to help.

[National Secretary Adolph] Germer asked that the police clear the room, which they did. Two cops were stationed at the stairway entrance, two at the top, and others in various parts of the hall.

The delegates were required to show their credentials and cards and those contested by charges being filed with Germer were not admitted until all the

bona fide were seated, and then only as spectators. Thirty-one delegates, representing 13 states were contested.

The Left Wingers, indignant at such treatment, adjourned to a back room of the building and held a caucus, excluding the press and all who were not Left Wingers. I have not been able to find out what transpired, other than a call for a convention was sent out to all Left Wingers, to be held at 1221 Blue Island, commencing Monday morning, Sept. 1.†

At 11:30 the delegates were seated and the press and public admitted. The Machinists’ Hall was filled to its capacity, which is about 1,000. Adolph Germer called the meeting to order and gave a short address, saying in part he “believed the Socialist Party of America had reached an epoch in its history as a working class movement.” “The tremendous changes brought about by the world war had created a difference of opinion in the party, until a convention was absolutely necessary to adjust matters.” He was not discouraged by the present revolt in the party because he believed “it would lead to a healthy growth if the party is not torn to shreds and left in a condition wherein it is not able to function.” He stated that “the SP has held aloft the torch of internationalism” and cited Victor Berger, who was not allowed to take his seat in Congress “after he was duly elected by the people,” as a victim because of his uncompromising attitude. He rebuked the insurgents for their sneaking tactics and underhand methods and accused them of trying to break down the confidence of the membership, and said the convention was called as a rebuke to

†- Denney garbles the story here; the Blue Island convention call had been issued previously — this was for the convention that was to become the Communist Party of America, which began on schedule Sept. 1, 1919. The excluded delegates at the Socialist Party Convention on August 30 were the core of what was to become the Communist Labor Party.

the rebels. Germer read Section 6 of the party constitution to show just cause for contesting the seating of delegates.†

Seymour Stedman was elected Chairman of the day and gave a short talk on the causes of the war, conquest for markets, etc. Algernon Lee was elected Vice Chairman of the day. Gerber of New York was elected Secretary.

According to rules a Sergeant at Arms was to be elected. When the proposition was made the “Lefts” called out, “Nominate Garity!” (Chief of Police), which caused such an uproar that the Chairman rapped loud and long for order.

A Committee of 7 was elected to investigate and report on contested delegates. The following were duly elected: Panken, Roewer, Nagle, Plunkett, Van Essen, Ameringer, and Howe.

While awaiting the report of the tellers on the committee vote, an irate SP in the back of the hall wanted to know if the Socialists were going to allow the police bullies to insult their members without protest; if they were, then they shouldn’t call themselves Socialists any more. One of the members in the back of the room had remonstrated with one of the cops about the rough handling when they had cleared the hall at Germer’s suggestion, and the cop replied that if he didn’t shut up, he would throw him downstairs and he wouldn’t light on his feet either; he’d think he’d descended in an aeroplane. A mighty protest went up against the cops. A motion was made and seconded that the matter be taken up with Chief of Police Garity, but the Chairman [Stedman] refused to entertain it, stating that the SP convention was under jurisdiction of the police whether this was liked or not. To quiet the outraged a Committee of 1 was appointed by the Chair to investigate. This committee reported the statement of the comrade to be correct and verified by six witnesses who heard the remark. A motion was supported to proceed with the order of business — and

the cops smiled.

A lengthy discussion followed the election of an Economic Organization Committee when one delegate wanted the committee to consist only of men who were members of a craft union. But the motion was lost and a committee elected without the “intellectual development” that a craft union inspires in getting all factions of the working class together.

At this juncture the Left Wingers issued a bulletin and covered the convention with them, which reads in part as follows:

To All Delegates:

We address you to inform you of occurrences this morning which every revolutionary Socialist on the floor of the convention will protest against.

Delegations from Illinois, Minnesota, Washington, Oregon, Ohio, Nebraska, California, and other states entered the convention floor and took their seats in readiness for the opening of the convention.

At nearly 10 o’clock, Gerber of New York and Goebel of New Jersey, who were at the door and attempted to refuse the above named delegates admission, called the police and these delegations were ejected from the hall by police power, many of them being roughly handled.

We wonder how many delegates upon the floor of this convention will stand for such procedure. We wonder how many delegates upon the floor of this convention will silently comply with the acts of a reactionary officialdom in attempting to control this convention by denying seats to delegates.

There is but one thing you can do, comrade delegates. That is to make as your first command upon the calling of the convention to order that all delegates elected to attend this convention be seated and that the Credentials Committee decide what contests there may be. Certainly no one man or half a dozen men shall decide this for you preliminary to the opening of the convention.

We shall address you again in the important matters which it becomes your duty to act upon. To us your duty at this moment seems clear. DEMAND THAT ALL DELEGATES BE SEATED in this preliminary convention until you have an opportunity to determine who are the rightful delegates to this convention.

National Executive Committee,
Socialist Party.

†- Presumably this is a reference to Article 9 (Conventions), Section 6 of which reads: “Sec. 6. (a) The election of delegates to the National Convention shall, wherever possible, be completed not later than sixty days preceding the convention, and the respective State Secretaries shall furnish the Executive Secretary with a list of accredited delegates immediately after said election. (b) The Executive Secretary shall prepare a printed roster of the accredited delegates to be sent to each delegate and forwarded to the party press for publication. Such list shall contain the occupation of each delegate at the time of his nomination and his office or employment in the party. All official reports required to be presented to the National Convention shall be printed and sent to each delegate elected at least fifteen days before the date of the convention and furnished to the party press for publication. (c) At the time and place set for the opening of the National Convention, the Executive Secretary shall call the convention to order, and shall call the roll to ascertain the number of uncontested delegates, and they shall permanently organize the convention.”

Gerber, very indignant at being so slandered, gained the floor on a question of personal privilege and lambasted the radicals as prevaricators of the truth. Germer also had the floor and gave them a piece of his mind, but admitted he asked the police to clear the hall, but did not add “treat ’em rough” to his mandate. Mrs. Gordon, a delegate from Kansas, said she was one of the delegates ejected and said she heard Germer say, “If they don’t get out do your duty.” She also wanted to know what the officials were going to say to the rank and file of Kansas for not seating the other delegate from Kansas, who was elected by a majority greater than any other delegate in the state.†

Tilts between the Lefts and Rights kept things lively all day.

Seymour Stedman didn’t think it an opportune time to nominate Presidential candidates for 1920. [Louis] Engdahl took the position that something was being “put over” and stated his loyalty to Gene Debs and wanted him nominated for President. Stedman retaliated and said he had been Gene Debs’ friend and ardent supporter before Engdahl came into the party, but he didn’t think it a good policy, considering Debs’ safety, to put him in nomination at this time.‡

Committee on Contests reported it was ready to take up hearing of contested delegates at 7:30 pm, commencing with California.

The convention adjourned to meet Sunday [Aug. 31] at 2 pm.

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CHICAGO, ILL., Sept. 3. — The session of Saturday afternoon [Aug. 30, 1919] was stormy indeed. After the fistic encounters of the morning between Reed (LW) and Gerber (RW) of New York, and the clearing of the hall by the police at the suggestion

of Germer, the police stationed around the hall became an eyesore. One delegate made a motion that “the police be removed” and much discussion followed. A number of the Left Wing delegates who had been seated “bolted” the convention, declaring, “If the regularly elected delegates could not be seated and the convention was to be run by the police, they would not participate.” They called for all Left Wingers to go downstairs for a caucus.

The motion to remove the police was declared out of order by Stedman.

About this time a circular was distributed in the convention by the Lefts, stating “that the police were in the hall at the suggestion of Germer and Gerber to keep the Left Wing delegates out and asked if they were going to tolerate their comrades from being ejected from the hall, etc.”

Gerber was given the floor and stated that anyone who said he had anything to do with the police being there lied. He said he ordered Reed to leave the hall because he had been a party member only one year, while the constitution provided that a delegate must be a member three years, and Reed refused to go, saying he had been elected by the Socialists of New York. The fight followed.§

Germer took the floor and said he “did not call the police in, but asked them to clear the hall after they came up.”

Mrs. Gordon (Left), a delegate from Kansas, stated that she was in the hall and heard Germer say to the police, “Put them out and if they don’t go peaceably, do your duty.”

Chairman Stedman stated that the police were there on orders from the Bureau of Immigration and the Department of Justice and the convention had no power to remove them, if they so desired.Δ

Another motion was made that the convention

†- Apparently a reference to Ludwig Katterfeld, from Dighton, KS, who was one of the top leaders of the Left Wing in the SPA. The literature has not previously noted that Germer & Co. singled out Katterfeld, a duly elected delegate from a non-contested state, in this way. Most of the contests were related to entire state organizations that were suspended and hastily “reorganized” by the outgoing NEC, resulting in dual slates of delegates.

‡- Stedman and Gene Debs served together on the 5 member National Executive Board of the Social Democratic Party in 1898. Gene’s brother Theodore was the National Secretary of the organization.

§- On this specific, Julius Gerber was absolutely correct. Article 9 (Conventions), Section 4 reads in part: “No delegate shall be eligible unless he is a resident member of the state from which his credential is presented, and shall have been a member of the party organization at least three years.”

Δ- While this no doubt explains the proximity of so many police to the convention, this seems a truly weak argument for a lawyer like Stedman to have made. There was a symbiotic relationship between the police and the SP Regulars — information for protection.

enter protest to the Department of Justice and Bureau of Immigration. The motion was tabled.† At this juncture a communication was handed to the Secretary from the Machinists' Union, which owns the hall. The letter read as follows:

On behalf of the Die and Tool Makers' Lodge No. 113, International Association of Machinists, an the Machinists' Society of Chicago, we protest against the harboring and use of police in this hall. This hall is the property, as well as the sanctuary, of a progressive and militant labor organization based upon the class struggle. We do not permit our members to work under police protection; we can not conceive how we can let any meeting in this hall be carried on under police protection, when we as an organization condemn and oppose it. While we are not represented in your convention as individual members or representatives of an organization, we nevertheless are with you in spirit. For all these reasons we can not let the police remain as your protectors, or perhaps as your invited guests, without submitting our deepest protest. We call upon you to take steps to remove the police or make such arrangements as will satisfy us that you are not responsible for the presence of the police.

We are not asking this to put hardship on you, but for the best interest of the Socialist Party and the labor movement.

A motion was made to proceed with business. Another protest went up "that we go on record as protesting against the presence of the police and in due courtesy to the Machinists' Union make a reply to their protest." The Secretary [Gerber] was instructed to write a reply to the Machinists' Union, and the convention proceeded with business.

The officialdom refused to seat 32 delegates representing 13 states, whose seats were contested.

Judge [Jacob] Panken of New York, as Chairman of the Committee of 7, sat on the cases of the derelicts and rebels. Panken added glory to his profession by asking the victims personal questions and try-

†- See the 4th footnote on page 3 above.

‡- One delicious irony of this moment is the fact that National Secretary Adolph Germer, the *primus inter pares* leader of the Socialist Party Regulars, was at this very time out on bail provided by millionaire Socialist William Bross Lloyd, a Left Winger. Germer was free pending appeal of his conviction by Kennesaw Mountain Landis for violation of the so-called Espionage Act. The conviction was eventually reversed on the grounds of judicial prejudice.

§- On this matter, Lloyd was absolutely correct. Article III (Management), Section 3(a) of the SP constitution explicitly states: "The call for the regular election of members of the National Executive Committee shall be issued on the 1st day of January, 1918, and on January 1st of each odd numbered year thereafter. Members elected in 1918 shall retire July 1st, 1919." There was no constitutional provision for a retiring NEC to abrogate party elections and retain power, pending ratification by a convention packed by that retiring NEC; nor a provision for this packed convention's decision to suspend the constitution and elect the successor NEC. The SP Regulars used legalistic arguments against the Left Wing to justify their own fundamentally illegal behavior, which was essentially a coup.

Δ- This line of argument, declaring an internal opposition caucus a "dual organization" and expelling them on that grounds, was later used with similar effect by the AF of L administration in purging itself of the Trade Union Educational League. There is no provision of the Socialist Party constitution which forbids the organization of internal caucuses.

ing to find out if such and such happened, what an effect it might have upon their deliberations as delegates. Cross-questions of this nature fired the spirit of the more revolutionary and some of them told Judge Panken things which, to say the least, were not complimentary. Notable among these was Jack Carney of "Old Erin" [Ireland], but recently of Minnesota. He was elected mostly by the miners now on strike around Duluth in the iron mountain district and sent to represent men who do things, the sons of toil that puts the adamant foundation under a parasitical society that uses the Judge Pankens to keep them on the backs of the workers. To say that Carney represented them is putting it mildly. He pleaded guilty as charged and was proud of his position as a Left Winger. He asked Judge Panken what he would say to them when he went back. Should he tell them the socialist Party had sold them out to a lot of politicians? No! by the Gods; they would fight every obstacle in the way to revolutionary Socialism and emancipation.

Another stirring address was delivered to the committee by [Kasper] Bauer of California and a member of the SLP at one time. His SLP training served him for once and he told them something.

William Bross Lloyd was also on the carpet, charged with establishing dual national and state offices and withholding funds from the NEC or National Secretary.‡ When asked why he did so, he said he "considered their term of office expired July 1 [1919] and didn't believe in turning over party funds not authorized to receive them.§ He was also charged with participating in a convention in New York held for the purpose of establishing a dual organization.Δ

Katterfeld of Kansas and [Fred] Harwood of New Jersey were charged with participating in a dual orga-

nization and sending out circulars to party member asking that money be withheld from the National Secretary. The result was that only 4 or 5 states sent money in for special stamps for the Emergency Convention. They also called at national headquarters and demanded that Germer turn over the books.

[R.E.] Richardson of Utah was spokesman for the Utah delegation. Their seats were contested by Stoney proposed that E.G. Loehe be the delegate instead of Richardson and [E.T.] Hyde, who were elected at a convention after Stoney had been caught and exposed in trying to get the Secretary of the Salt Lake City Local to vote a defunct local for himself as delegate. Richardson stated that Stoney was a candidate for High Priest of the Mormon Church and that the proposed Loche was a recruiter for the IWW.

When Richardson was asked if he was instructed by his constituents to support the Left Wing he said he “was instructed to support the Left Wing program and go down the line with the Left Wing.”†

The seats of the California delegates were contested on the ground that State Secretary [John] Taylor allowed foreign speaking federations that had been suspended by the NEC to participate in the election. Taylor stated he did not think the NEC had a right to suspend them, thought it was a matter for the convention to decide. He sent ballots to them with the understanding that they would be tabulated separately. The delegates were elected with a big majority without these votes.

It would be a waste of time to enumerate all the charges and countercharges brought against and by the Left Wing. Suffice it to say, the Left Wingers had an organization built up within the SP that would have captured the convention if they had been seated. Their instructions in nearly every case were to try to capture the convention, and failing in this to go over to the Communist Party.

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Right Wing Convention.

CHICAGO, ILL., Sept. 7. — Under report of NEC relative to Referendum C, which was the referendum that elected the Left Wing delegates, the committee insisted that slates were made up, locals and federations had voted en bloc, and upon this evidence Referendum C [the 1919 Party Election] was declared null and void.‡

When the time came to elect official committees in the convention a slate made up with exactly the right number of candidates for each committee was passed out. A howl went up that shook the rafters. A lady delegate from the west made a motion that “we vote the entire slate, as it will be elected anyway.”§ Another wanted to know who was responsible. Algernon Lee took the floor and acknowledged he helped fix the slate together with some other members. He then tried to defend his position by saying “we should think in groups.” This practice of “thinking in groups” had been considered very harmful when explained by a delegate from a foreign federation relative to Referendum C.

On Thursday [Sept. 4, 1919] when the committee voted on the manifesto, some interesting discussions took place. The manifesto declared allegiance to the Third International and pledged support to Germany, Austria, and Soviet Russia. Some of the delegates did not think Germany had a Socialist Republic. Victor Berger, [Oscar] Ameringer, and others thought they at least should not be criticized. The lady delegate from the west [Moilanen] wanted to know “why Victor Berger criticized William Bross Lloyd and supported the SPs in Germany.” The manifesto stated we were allied with the central powers that had parcelled out Asia and Africa. One delegate wanted to know “what is the difference between parcelling out Asia and Africa and the United States taking hold of San Domingo by military force and securing cheap labor for the American capitalists?”

When the Committee on Principles reported through Algernon Lee (Chairman), the delegation wanted to know why he did not state “our principles.”

†- Richardson and Hyde were not seated; both became founding members of the Communist Labor Party. There was no Utah delegation seated at the Socialist Party convention.

‡- There was no part of the Socialist Party constitution that banned either organized factions or bloc voting. The hysteria over these topics arose only after the vote in the 1919 SP Election (Referendum C) was cast and the Regular faction defeated in a landslide.

§- The only delegate fitting this description seems to have been delegate Lauri Moilanen from Oregon.

Lee explained that “this is a campaign year and we do not deem it advisable at this time to declare ourselves.” One of the delegates wanted to know “if we haven’t any principles, then what in the devil are we here for?”

Much discussion also followed the proposal to elect the NEC in convention rather than by referendum.† One delegate made the statement that “the rank and file couldn’t be trusted.”

Ameringer told a funny story illustrating the method by which the capitalists would organize a stove industry and wanted the same method applied to the party management.

It was agreed that the NEC be elected in convention.

Another clause that stated all persons making application to the party must become citizens within 3 months of becoming members, started something that caused the chair to resign. It was carried.

The Right Wing SP Convention came to a close at 7:30 pm Friday [Sept. 5, 1919]. Nothing unusual marked the occasion, but the “shouting.” They buried themselves in resolutions and phrases. They resolved on the Mexican situation, the Soviet, the German Socialists, the Hungarian Socialists; endorsed industrial unionism — not any particular brand (like the other fellow’s whiskey, there wasn’t any bad), but all kinds; went on record as endorsing Eugene Debs for Presidential candidate, but didn’t want Kate O’Hare included; and, as we breathlessly waited to hear them propose one constructive plan to organize the workers, they adjourned *sine die*.

Left Wing Convention.

After the Left Wing bolted the Emergency Convention they assembled in another room in the Machinists’ Hall, 113 Ashland Blvd., and held a caucus. They decided to call a convention for 6 pm, Saturday, Aug. 30.

The meeting was called to order on time and opened by all standing and singing “The Internationale.” They then gave three cheers for Gene Debs, three cheers for Kate O’Hare, three cheers for the IWW, and three cheers for Soviet Russia. If enthusiasm could emancipate the workers, we would all be free.

The Left Wing Convention, composed of delegates who bolted the Socialist Party Convention and which later adopted the name Communist Labor Party of America, came to a close at 11 pm, Friday [Sept. 5, 1919]. The program was finished by all standing and singing “The Internationale,” “The Red Flag,” and the new song of the party:

Glorious, glorious, we’ll make the Bolshevik victorious,
Praise to the plutes, they’re making more of us,
While Gene lies in prison for us all.

The differences expressed during the week on the floor seemed to have been eliminated and they went back to the rank and file with one purpose.

There were 92 delegates seated, representing a membership of 30,000.‡ During the week several delegates from the Communist Party came over to the Lefts. Two of the delegates went over to the Communist Party from the Lefts.§

†- There was no provision of the Socialist Party constitution to allow for the governing NEC to be elected by the convention; nor did the convention have the legal authority to change the constitution to make it possible to elect the NEC.

Article III (Management), Section 3. (a) The call for the regular election of members of the National Executive Committee shall be issued on the 1st day of January, 1918, and on January 1st of each odd numbered year thereafter. Members elected in 1918 shall retire July 1st, 1919. (b) Forty days shall be allowed for nominations, 20 days for acceptances and declinations, and 60 days for the referendum. The candidates receiving the highest votes shall in each case be declared elected. The term of their office shall be for 2 years beginning on the 1st day of July.

Article XV (Amendments), Section 1. This constitution may be amended by a referendum of the party membership; amendments may be proposed by the National Convention, or upon the request of locals representing at least 8 percent of the entire membership on the basis of dues paid in the preceding year. All such amendments to be submitted seriatim to a referendum vote of the party membership. * * *

Article XV (Amendments), Section 2. All amendments shall take effect 60 days after being approved by the membership.

‡- That is to say, the *claimed* membership. Although no sound CLP membership data has emerged from the archives, the actual number of CLP supporters at the inception was but a fraction of this number. After initial confusion came the January repression, when confusion moved to chaos. When the smoke cleared in 1920 the CLP had no more than a few thousand members.

§- Actually, there were 7 delegates who left the CLP Convention to the CP Convention: C.E. Ruthenberg and 6 of the 7 Minnesota delegates — Clara Strong Broms, Charles Dirba, Carl Haglund, H. Holm, Carl Skoglund, and Joseph Ungar.

Many of the IWW were seated as delegates and tried to swing the party into that organization, but failed. When the program and labor committee reported, a clause was inserted that “we recognize the IWW as the one big union.” An amendment was offered that “we include the WIIU.”† Much discussion followed, which resulted in neither one being endorsed.

Harrison, Cox, and Lingenfelter were given the floor to talk on industrial unionism. This resulted in a bit of trickery on the part of the IWW. A motion was made that William Haywood be given the floor the following afternoon to talk on class war prisoners. It carried. The following forenoon a motion was made that a committee of 3 be appointed to invite William Haywood to speak, and it was carried. Haywood replied by letter, stating he could not address them at this time.

A move on the part of the New York delegates, with Reed and Gitlow in the lead, to insert the phrase “mass action,” with all its confusion of ideas, was successful to a certain extent.

The one thing the Communist Labor Party needs most is instruction regarding the form the future Industrial Republic must take and that the transition from capitalism to Socialism, and the SLP alone can furnish that instruction.

Communist Party Convention.

The Communist Party Convention elected the following officials:

International Secretary: Fraina; Alternate: Ferguson.

Central Committee of 15: Schwartz, Bittelman, Ballam, Hourwich, Elbaum, Cohen, Ashkenuzi, Ruthenberg, Tyverovsky, Petras, Wolff, Lovestone, Fraina, Housity, Karosas.‡

Ruthenberg of Cleveland, O., was elected National Secretary, and Fraina, National Editor.

This is by far the most interesting convention of the three. They have 129 delegates seated and claim to represent a constituency of 50,000.§ No delegate is seated unless he represents at least a constituency of 50 members. The expense of the convention is paid by each delegate being assessed \$50.

When a proposition of a conference with a view of consolidating the conventions of the Communist Labor Party and the Communist Party was made by the Lefts [CLP], they gave them a slap in the face, declaring they were kicked out of the SP. They later elected a committee of 5 to meet the committee from the CLP, but failed to reach an agreement.

They put all stress on mass action. Dennis E. Batt opened the meeting on Monday [Sept. 1, 1919], but later was arrested in the hall. He is now out on \$1,000 bail and participating in the convention.

†- The Workers International Industrial Union (WIIU) was an SLP-sponsored breakaway organization from the IWW.

‡- Actually, instead of those listed by Denney as “Wolff” and “Housity” (*sic.*), the CEC elected by the convention included Charles Dirba and Harry Wicks.

§- Certainly an inflated figure, probably by a factor of 2, give or take.

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