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# Socialists Avert Radical Changes in Party's Policy: Convention Ballots Down Suggestion of Compromise with Other Groups

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ST. LOUIS.— One of the most radical changes in the policy and tactics of the Socialist Party, proposed in an amendment to the party constitution, was defeated by a vote of 59-1/2 to 100-1/2. The proposition was embodied in a change in Article 10, Section 3, reading as follows:

The platform of the Socialist Party shall be the supreme declaration of the party and all state and municipal platforms shall conform thereto. No state or local organization shall under any circumstances fuse or compromise with any other political party or organization, nor shall any candidate of the Socialist Party accept any nomination or endorsement from any other political party.

Whenever, because of high filing fees, or lack of suitable candidates, or because of elimination in the primary contest, the Socialist Party has no candidate in the field, no other candidate shall be endorsed or supported by the Socialist Party organization; but individual members of the party shall be free to vote or not to vote as they deem best under the circumstances.

State organizations and any of their subdivisions shall be free to cooperate with other groups to secure more liberal state constitutions and the passage of initiative and referendum measures in the interest of the working class.

## **Much Sentiment Found.**

The discussion showed a much larger sentiment in favor of this change than had been expected. Several delegates stated openly that in great economic struggles of labor, where much depended on the outcome of elections, and where the Socialist candidate didn't have a chance, they had urged the election of non-Socialists.

Delegate [Stephen] Mahoney, New York, said he was opposed to putting all members of the party in

the same groove, in a straitjacket. Speakers pointed out that the government was changing, that there were various forms of primaries that eliminated Socialist candidates, that non-partisan laws made it impossible to always have a Socialist as a second choice.

## **Demands for Facts.**

This led Delegate [Joseph] Cannon, New York, to declare: "Theories must give way to facts."

Opposing delegates charged this change in the constitution would open the door to fusion with the old parties. Delegate Jane Tait, Pennsylvania, admitted there might be honest people outside the Socialist Party in her state, but charged they were not in politics. She was opposed to voting for non-Socialists under any circumstances. In Pittsburgh, she pointed out, when the Socialists did not qualify for the final elections, they used stickers with good effect.

Delegate [John] Kennedy, Chicago, on behalf of the Constitution Committee majority, opened the fight for this amendment by saying the Socialist Party was only fighting the class struggle on paper and that it was not fighting the class struggle in fact.

## **Trouble With Toilers.**

"In every other country on earth our comrades are allowed to make their second choice," he said. "We feel that where such circumstances arise, individuals should be allowed to do as they choose. If we deny our members that right we shall drive large numbers of

our members out of the party. Are we going to do things, or are we going to step aside and let others do the? The trouble is not with our theories but with our tactics.”

Delegate Algernon Lee, New York, wanted to recommit this section to the Constitution Committee and have them bring in a more favorable draft. It was voted down.

### **Spargo to Push Report.**

John Spargo, on behalf of 50 delegates who were not satisfied with the majority report on war and militarism adopted by the convention, presented a minority report to be submitted to the party membership through referendum along with the report adopted.

By a vote of 78 to 42 the convention voted to have the [majority] report adopted by it printed as a leaflet and distributed all over the nation. It was pointed out that the emergency for which the convention was called probably would have passed by the time the membership could act on the proposed program against war and militarism.

The convention then took up the question of abolishing the National Committee as it exists and increasing the size and character of the National Executive Committee.

In bringing this change in the constitution to the attention of the delegates Kennedy declared the present National Committee was a 5th wheel in the party organization and that its abolition would result in getting more efficient service.

Spargo's [alternative war and militarism] report follows:

Congress has declared that a state of war exists between this nation and Germany. War between the two nations is a fact.

We opposed the entrance of this republic into the war, but we failed. The political and economic organizations of the working class were not strong enough to do more than protest.

Having failed to prevent the war by our agitation, we can only recognize it as a fact and try to force upon the government, through pressure of public opinion, a constructive program.

Our aim now must be to minimize the suffering and misery which the war will bring to our own people, to protect

our rights and liberties against reactionary encroachments, and to promote an early peace upon a democratic basis, advantageous to the international working class.

Furthermore, we must seize the opportunity presented by war conditions to advance our program of democratic collectivism. Every one of the other belligerent nations has discovered through the war that capitalism is inherently inefficient. To secure a maximum of efficiency, whether for military or civil needs, it has been found necessary to abandon the essential principle of capitalist industry. The warring nations have had to give up the organization and operation of industry and the primary economic functions for profit, and to adopt the Socialist principle of production for use. Thus the war has demonstrated the superior efficiency of collective organization and operation of industry.

Guided by this experience, we would so reorganize our economic system as to secure for our permanent domestic needs the greatest possible results from the proper utilization of our national resources.

In furtherance of these aims, we propose the following

### **War Program**

1. We propose that the Socialist Party shall establish communication with the Socialists within the enemy nations, to the end that peace may be secured upon democratic terms at the earliest possible moment.

2. We demand that there be no interference with freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of assemblage.

3. We demand that dealings between the government and the workers in all of the industries and services taken over and operated by the government shall be conducted through their organizations, with due regard for the right of organization of those not yet organized.

4. We demand that conscription, if it come at all, shall begin with wealth. All annual incomes in excess of \$5,000 should be taken by the government and used to pay the current expenses of the war. If it is just to conscript a human being, it is just to conscript wealth. Money is not as sacred as human life.

5. We demand that there shall be no conscription of men until the American people shall have been given the right to vote upon it. Under the British empire the people of Australia were permitted to decide by ballot whether they should be conscripted. We demand for the American people the same right.

6. We demand that the government seize and operate for the benefit of the whole people the great industries concerned with production, transportation, storage, and marketing of the food and other necessities of the people.

7. We demand that the government take over and operate all land and water transport facilities; all water powers and irrigation plants; mines, forests, and oil fields; and all industrial monopolies; and that this be done at once, before the nation shall suffer calamity from the failure of their capitalist direction and management under war pressure.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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