
Report of the State Secretary to the 1919 State Convention of the Socialist Party of Ohio

[June 27, 1919]

**by Alfred Wagenknecht
and Hortense Wagenknecht**

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Comrade Delegates:

The State Secretary, together with State Organizer Charles Baker and C.E. Ruthenberg, were released from the Stark County workhouse on December 2, 1918. The entire work of the State Office for the 10 months previous had devolved upon Temporary State Secretary Hortense Wagenknecht. The State Executive Committee granted the State Secretary a three months' leave of absence beginning about the 1st of February [1918], for the purpose of taking charge of organization and propaganda at the National Office of our party. During these three months Mrs. Wagenknecht also functioned as Temporary State Secretary. This report, therefore, is in most part her report.

So far as agitation and propaganda are concerned, this state has seen unusual activity in the past year. The literature purchases and sales by the State Office have been very large. Locals have made it a point to patronize the State Office for literature and although the literature department has not been conducted at a profit, we have been instrumental in the circulation of thousands of pamphlets and this, after all, rather than profits, is the aim of our organization.

Many speakers have been toured by the state since the last convention of the party. Scott Nearing, Ross D. Brown, Kate Richards O'Hare, Tom Lewis, George R. Kirkpatrick, Thurber Lewis, L.E. Katterfeld, Lilith Martin, H.L.A. Holman, and Eugene V. Debs have all made more or less extended tours of the state. Speakers residing in

the state who gave much of their time to lecture work are Lotta Burke, H.J. Beery, Joseph W. Sharts, C.E. Ruthenberg, and State Organizer Baker. Other state speakers filled occasional dates. We want to call especial attention to the several northern Ohio tours made by Eugene V. Debs with the assistance of Marguerite Prevey and Charles Baker. These meetings were the largest ever held at the points touched, the crowds coming to hear Debs consisted of such numbers that halls were far too small to hold them. These meetings put new life into the organization in Ohio at a time when war and all that followed in its wake was discouraging Socialist activity.

The one disappointment of the year was our failure to place a state ticket in the field last fall [1918]. We failed by only several thousand of securing sufficient signatures. This, then, would be the best time to call the attention of the delegates to the coming municipal elections. Every delegate in attendance should make it his and her duty to induce the local to nominate candidates for municipal office at once. Many locals have already nominated candidates and begun campaigns. The example of these live locals should be followed by all other locals in the state.

The only speaker at present being toured is State Organizer Charles Baker. He is visiting locals in behalf of the party-owned printing plant fund. This tour has just begun and we hope that it will turn out very successful for numerous locals and members seem exceedingly interested and have volunteered their loyal support in behalf of this fund and its purpose.

Due to the riots instigated by the tools of capitalism, both hall and street meetings are, for the time being, impossible in many cities.¹ In a number of cities anti-street speaking ordinances have been passed. In Bellaire and Tiffin the comrades are fighting such ordinances through the initiative and referendum in accordance with a plan proposed by Joseph W. Sharts. We have therefore discontinued the routing of speakers for the present, but only until the locals begin their municipal campaigns, when we shall again give our best assistance in this form of propaganda.

While this lull in lecture propaganda is on we suggest that all locals and branches turn their attention toward strengthening their organization. There are two suggestions to follow toward this end. First,

¹ Reference in particular is to the May 1, 1919 Cleveland May Day riot, instigated by the police. Smaller disturbances seem to have also taken place in other Ohio cities at that time.

through study classes we must increase the intellectual quality of the membership. Second, through dues collectors we must seek to keep our membership in constant good standing. Every local should organize a study class. Every local should elect dues collectors. Between the two every local can maintain its membership and make it more efficient in propagating Socialism. Also, every local member, under the direction of the literature agent, should constitute himself a literature agent, selling as many pamphlets as he can every week, as well as *Ohio Socialist* subscription cards. These are methods of activity which can be easily prosecuted despite the denial of halls or street corners.

The Ohio Socialist is now the largest weekly party-owned Socialist paper in the United States. With a circulation of 20,000 in round numbers, we over-top the next largest paper by 5,000. Credit for this big circulation is due Elmer T. Allison, who as editor and manager has labored painstakingly to make our state paper a success. In fact, the *Ohio Socialist* is more than a state paper now. It is a national paper, for it enjoys a nationwide circulation, having subscribers not only in neighboring states, but in remote states as well. The growth in circulation has been steady since the State Executive Committee, a year ago, decided to issue it weekly. The financial report shows that the paper has contributed a surplus into the treasury during the year.

The general condition of the party in the state is very gratifying. We have lost some of the smaller locals, the rural locals, but the locals in the larger cities, the industrial locals, have grown and prospered. the convention must now earnestly deliberate the reasons for this very condition. This brings us to the party controversy and the formation of the Left Wing Section of the Socialist Party.

By vote of the State Executive Committee, the State Secretary [Alfred Wagenknecht] and Scott Wilkins of the committee were delegated to attend the Left Wing National Conference in New York [June 21-24, 1919].² This conference drafted a Left Wing program and manifesto, declared its relations with economic organizations, and decided to organize a new party, to be known as the Communist Party, should the National Emergency Convention of the Socialist Party refuse to seat delegates from Left Wing states and other party divisions, expelled or suspended for proclaiming themselves Left Wing Socialists, or should the National Executive Committee again postpone the emergency convention.

² Scott Wilkins was the former member of St. Mary's, Ohio, circa 1910. His political trajectory followed that of Benjamin Gitlow during the early 1930s.

The Socialist Party of Michigan intends calling a national convention to organize a new Socialist Party, this convention to meet in Chicago, September 1, 1919. Several of the suspended federations are supporting this call.

You will see by this that the situation in the Socialist Party is critical. Fully half of the party membership is suspended or expelled. Massachusetts is now being expelled. The State Executive Committee and the City Executive Committee has expelled half of the New York membership for being Left Wing Socialists. The Pennsylvania State Executive Committee has refused to abide by the decision of the National Executive Committee not to sell dues stamps to the suspended language federations and may be suspended as a result. The Socialist Party of Washington, the Socialist Party of New Jersey, and the German Socialist Federation have all adopted the Left Wing program and may also be suspended for so doing. The Jewish Socialist Federation is split in half, one half having organized its own federation for Left Wing Socialism.

Eventually, most of the Socialists will be outside the official party. In order to function state and nationally they will have to form some kind of an organization. the question now arises — in this event, what stand shall the Socialist Party of Ohio take? We can safely say that a vast majority of the membership in this state are Left Wing Socialists. Most of the larger locals have endorsed the Left Wing program and manifesto. As this question will undoubtedly come before the convention in concrete form we hope that the discussion will be deliberate and convincing, so that this state may be a unit in whatever action is taken.

The Emergency Convention of the Socialist Party will meet in Chicago on August 30, 1919. Ohio is to elect 16 delegates. If these delegates are to accurately represent this state, the convention ought to take under advisement the instructing of delegates as to possible contingencies.

We sincerely hope that the delegates and locals will not permit the party controversy to discourage them in the performance of their duties or to cause them to become inactive. the reshaping of methods and principles in alignment with experiences taught by the war and the Social Revolution is a very great need. The controversy caused by this attempt to reshape our tactics is a sign of party growth, a growth which may result in a temporary decrease in numbers but which will

eventually result in an increase in both intellectual and numerical strength.

The financial condition of the party is something to be really elated over. The balance on hand June 1, 1919, was \$3,366.31. Together with this we have property assets as follows: One automobile, \$400; two typewriters, \$60; one multigraph, \$250; office furniture, \$50; literature in stock, \$400; printed matter and supplies, \$200. This means that the total assets of the party are more than they have been before, nearly \$5,000. Add to this the conservative estimate of the value of the *Ohio Socialist* and its subscription list, namely, \$10,000, and we have a financial condition which we can well feel proud of. Here follows the financial report in totals and a comparison with receipts and expenses for the year previous.

Financial Report.

Total Receipts May 31, 1918 to May 31, 1919.

<i>Ohio Socialist</i> subscriptions	\$ 8,224.18
Dues Regular	3,699.20
Initiations	1,286.90
M.A.L.	187.75
Organization fund	1,112.38
Foreign Branch dues	1,803.51
Literature	882.70
Supplies	248.21
Industrial Freedom Certificates	595.50
Sustaining Fund Stamps	560.58
Miscellaneous	1,698.11
Debs' Defense	3,658.49
Press Fund	136.00

<i>Total Receipts</i>	<i>\$ 24,093.51</i>

Receipts from Same Sources for Previous Year.

<i>Ohio Socialist</i> subscriptions	\$ 704.00
Dues Regular	3,881.10
Initiations	1,637.50
M.A.L.	225.50

Organization fund	1,373.76
Foreign Branch dues	1,759.83
Literature	1,064.78
Supplies	560.17
Sustaining Fund Stamps	657.00
Miscellaneous	1,559.33

<i>Total Receipts</i>	<i>\$ 13,980.42</i>

Total Expenditures May 31, 1918 to May 31, 1919.

Dues stamps	\$ 2,445.00
Supplies	53.75
Literature	563.54
Dues Foreign Branches	707.60
Organization Expenses	1,266.59
Debs' Defense	1,243.64
Miscellaneous	1,699.29
Salaries	3,642.00
Telegrams	82.00
Office Supplies	685.77
Postage	503.98
Printing	341.00
Auto expenses	310.55
Sustaining fund	904.77
Ohio Socialist publishing	7,562.60

<i>Total Expenses</i>	<i>\$ 22,012.08</i>

Receipts from Same Sources for Previous Year.

Dues stamps	\$ 2,393.00
Supplies	627.62
Literature	1,184.36
Dues Foreign Branches	619.92
Organization Expenses	1,316.62
Miscellaneous	1,936.31
Salaries	2,352.00
Telegrams	133.11
Office Supplies	240.70

Postage	541.28
Printing	545.25
Sustaining fund	188.20
Ohio Socialist publishing	1,304.43

<i>Total Expenses</i>	<i>\$ 13,457.31</i>

Receipts over expenses per month for the year May 31, 1917 to May 31, 1918 were \$43.59. Receipts over expenses for the year May 31, 1918 to May 31, 1919 were \$173.14 per month.

Fraternally submitted,

A. Wagenknecht,
State Secretary.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport

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