
Party Delegates Ready to Meet Big Problems at National Convention

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CHICAGO, Aug. 29 [1919].—The total paid-up membership of the Socialist Party throughout the country today is just 39,750.

This is the biggest single fact facing the national convention of the party, which opens here tomorrow morning.

Starting in January 3, this year, with 109,589 members, the party has been battered down to its present figure by 7 months of attacks from within, the cause of which remains obscure, while their object, if they have any beyond the rupture of the party, is impossible to discover.

The membership has been cut down almost two-thirds; the National Office is practically without funds; the forces of reaction are ever welding their ranks closer in their united assault on the party; and yet the spirit manifest here tonight, on the eve of the convention, is one of energy, enthusiasm, and hopeful, vigorous work to rebuild a still greater party in 1920 than the one which polled nearly 1 million votes in 1912.

In his report to the National Executive Committee, Adolph Germer, National Executive Secretary, says of the reduced membership figure that it “cannot be taken as a legitimate showing, due to the internal controversy.”†

“I feel confident,” he added, “that I am stating the situation correctly when I say that there are thou-

sands of comrades who are as loyal as ever, but have been driven to total disgust as a result of the ‘wingism’ injected into the party. These comrades are awaiting the action of the coming special national convention, and, if we adopt the proper platform and program, and if the ranks are cleared of the propagandists that cause disgust and discouragement, these comrades will quickly come back to the party and take up anew their activity.”‡

Germer met with the National Executive Committee today to perfect arrangements for the convention. This may be the last meeting of the committee. A report of the investigating committee into the referendum by which the Left Wing claims the election of another Executive Committee may be retained, or the “new” committee installed, or the convention may order a new referendum.

Committees Are at Work.

In a dozen rooms at headquarters committees are at work preparing resolutions, reports, platforms, and a manifesto of the party’s position. All this will speed up the work of the convention tremendously, for the delegates want to do what has to be done as quickly as possible and get back to their various districts and take up the everyday work of the party.

†- The cited figure, contrary to Secretary Germer’s upbeat spin, was indeed a “legitimate showing.” According to its own official statistics, the Socialist Party of America averaged 34,926 actually paid members in the 4th Quarter of 1919. [Trachtenberg and Glassberg (eds.), *The American Labor Year Book, 1921-1922*. (NY: Rand School of Social Science, 1922), pg. 392.] The primary reason for the loss of over 70,000 members was the policy of mass suspensions and expulsions in which the National Executive Committee and its factional allies engaged in an effort to eradicate the Left Wing factional insurgency, which had won majority support in the party.

‡- Germer seems to have been oblivious to the real situation in the party. Socialist Party dues actually paid for the year 1920 averaged 26,766 [*Ibid.*] and continued to plummet thereafter.

The New York state delegation caucused late this afternoon and evening. Caucuses were also held by a number of other state delegations, some reaching their decisions en route.

The resolutions will cover a wide range of subjects from the menacing efforts of the oil ring to force war with Mexico to the party's relation to the trade unions.

Nominations Possible.

While it is open speculation as to whether candidates will be nominated by the convention for the 1920 Presidential campaign (no agenda having been prepared) there is a strong inclination to go right ahead and put out a ticket.

The talk is all as to whether or not the convention should nominate now. There is not the slightest suggestion of electioneering. There could not possibly be any.

Only one name is mentioned for the Presidency — Eugene Victor Debs. Kate Richards O'Hare, imprisoned at Jefferson City, Mo., as Debs is caged like a felon at Atlanta, is mentioned as his running partner. The Illinois delegates will insist that the convention nominate Debs and O'Hare, instead of waiting for a nominating convention next year.

Surrounded even more completely with mystery than the Left Wing, the organizing committee of the "Communist Party" arrived today and began work at 1221 Blue Island Avenue. The committee has not even disclosed where its convention, which is due to get under way Monday [Sept. 1, 1919], will be held.

It is supposed to represent the 7 expelled [*sic.*] language federations and the expelled state organization of Michigan, but it is known that much friction has developed lately between the Michigan group and the language federations. Altogether, the Left Wing has apparently split into three parts, while the Socialist Party faces the convention with a unified spirit and purpose.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.

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