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# Supplementary Report of the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party of America to the Emergency National Convention: Chicago, IL — September 4, 1919.

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This report was delivered to the convention by James ONeal,  
who seems likely to have been the main author.

In response to the request of the convention, we submit this supplementary report.

The reasons for suspending the offending language federations were stated in the June Bulletin of the National Office. They are, in brief, as follows:

Section 2 of Article 12 of the constitution provides that the duty of each Translator-Secretary “shall be to serve as a medium of communication between his federation and the national organization of the Socialist Party.”

The suspended federations, instead of serving this purpose, assumed power to reverse decisions of the National Executive Committee. They demanded that the amnesty convention we tried to arrange be abandoned or they would oppose it.

The federations attempted to usurp power that belongs only to the general membership and conventions and such power as is delegated to the National Executive Committee between conventions. Either the National Executive Committee had to accept the offending federations as a self-constituted supreme court with power to veto our decisions, or else suspend the federations. In this conduct the federations violated Section 5(a) of Article 12 of the constitution.

The suspended federations had also tried and convicted the Socialist Party and the National Executive Committee in their language publications. This took the form of charges that the party was a party of “Scheidemanns” and “Kolchaks,” betrayers of Socialism and the working class. These foul slanders contin-

ued for months and no member of these federations thought it necessary to even inform us that the party was on trial or intimated that we should have a hearing.

It is evident that most of the members of the federations honestly believed that the Socialist Party had become an annex to the capitalist class and world imperialism. They heard one side, and it was so persistently presented that their minds were poisoned against the party and the National Executive Committee.

## **Slandorous Propaganda Appeared in English Publications of Left Wing.**

After the suspensions some of this propaganda appeared in the English publications of the Left Wing. The National Office has a number of translations from the language papers that may be consulted by the delegates. In our first report we have given quotations from organs of each wing of the Left Wing in which both admit this propaganda was waged to destroy the Socialist Party.

The suspended federations had also violated the spirit and intent of Section 3(a) of Article 10 in a joint communication to the National Executive Committee, stating that they would “brook no opposition to the stand they have taken” in refusing to abide by the constitution and bylaws of Local New York.

Local New York had to expel certain language branches for violations of the local constitution or it-

self be expelled by the state organization. Section 3(a) of Article 10 of the national constitution provides that "no state or local organization shall under any circumstances fuse, combine or compromise with any other political party or organization." We assume that a language federation cannot do what a state organization cannot do.

The National Executive Committee had issued a statement in January [1919] regarding this same matter with reference to labor parties. It was a unanimous decision of the committee. NO protest came from any section of the party regarding this action. Yet the language federations assumed that they could assume a relationship toward the Left Wing organization and program that we prohibited in the case of labor parties and their programs.

It is claimed that the federations were not given a trial. The federations were before the committee for two days. An informal consideration of all the documents bearing on the actions of the federations had been in process for many hours, when Comrade [Joseph] Stilson of the Lithuanian Federation demanded that the charges be formulated in one document. The matter was postponed until this could be done.

The next day charges were formulated and presented. They appear on page 9 of the June Bulletin. A stenographer was present. A record of this second stage of the trial has been printed and handed to the delegates to the convention. It contains 75 pages of single spaced reading matter and records the defense made by Comrades Stilson, Katterfeld, and Wagenknecht. This record is in your hands. It is sufficient answer to the repeated statement that the offending language federations were suspended without a trial.

### **Suspensions Considered Temporary; Final Action Up to National Parley.**

We might add that in voting the suspension we regarded our action as temporary. We provided that the convention should decide whether the evidence was sufficient to justify suspension and also urged that the language federations have their own representatives at the convention to present their case to the delegates. They are with the Communist Party, not here, and even many of their late associates and defenders in the convention downstairs [with the Communist

Labor Party] find it impossible to either agree or to associate with the language federations.

The revocation of the charter of Michigan was due to the fact that the state convention adopted the following provision in the state constitution:

An member, local or branch of a local, advocating legislative reforms or supporting organizations formed for the purpose of advocating such reforms, shall be expelled from the Socialist Party. The State Executive Committee is authorized to revoke the charter of any local that does not conform to this amendment.

There is no mistaking the meaning of this clause. It is a well known fact that this Michigan organization overemphasizes political action, though opposing any program of immediate measures in the interest of the working class. On the other hand, it has little use for labor unions and industrial action. By adopting this clause, the state convention made it mandatory that a member supporting the position of the national party in this matter should be expelled.

In the view of the Michigan organization, if the party members in California urged the repeal of the Criminal Syndicalist Law, a violation of which subjects the offender to 14 years' imprisonment, these California Socialists would be bad Socialists and unfit to associate themselves with the Socialists of Michigan. Or, if the Socialist members of the New York Legislature were to introduce a bill providing that territorial representation in that body should be abolished and representation be based upon useful occupations and industries, the New York Socialists would be outcasts.

The clause would even penalize a comrade who represented his labor union before a legislative committee in demanding the extension of the franchise to hundreds of thousands of Negroes and whites who are disfranchised in the Southern states. All of these measures are "reforms," but as such they are of vital interest to the working class until capitalism becomes only a memory.

### **Objectionable Clause Called Violation of Second Article of Constitution.**

The objectionable clause is in violation of Section 5, Article 2, which reads:

In all my political action while a member of the Socialist Party, I agree to be guided by the constitution and platform of that party.

Also Section 3(a) of Article 10, which reads, in part, 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.

It is claimed that no trial was given Michigan. It is true that Michigan had no delegated representative present. But it is also true that prominent Michigan members in articles in the Left Wing press placed the same interpretation on the clause that we did.

Comrades Wagenknecht and Katterfeld of the [National Executive] Committee, defending the Michigan organization, did not deny that the clause was subject to our interpretation and the interpretation of prominent Michigan members. They urged that we postpone action until the State Secretary arrived, stating that he might interpret it differently.

### **Keracher Didn't Deny Questionable Clause Had Been Approved by Vote.**

State Secretary Keracher arrived the day after action was taken. He did not deny that the convention had adopted the questionable clause nor would he deny that it had been approved by a referendum vote. He offered no other interpretation of the clause than the one we held.

The stenographic record in your hands shows that an opportunity was presented Comrade Keracher to reopen the entire case. The committee was willing to do this if Comrade Keracher could produce any facts showing that the committee was in error in its interpretation. Comrade Keracher had this opportunity and refused to give us any information and the case was closed.

We believe that it is not an easy thing to make all platforms conform to the general ideas embodied in the national platform, but, on the whole, the various sub-divisions of the party conform as nearly as possible.

We believed the Michigan case was a glaring one and a clear violation of the party principle. Had the state convention and the party members offered the

clause as a recommendation for action in the national convention there could have been no objection, but to adopt it and make it mandatory on pain of expelling members who accepted the national party position, was to make outcasts of these members.

The Massachusetts case can hardly be separated from the language federations, as these dominated the state organization. Out of some 5,000 party members, less than 1,000 are English-speaking locals. The Left Wing language organizations were retained as an integral part of the state organization after their suspension by the National Executive Committee. They were permitted to vote in the election of delegates to the National Emergency Convention. The state convention, held in June [1919], voted to strike out a clause approving political action and to substitute the following clause:

The object of this organization shall be to enlighten and organize the working class for the purpose of overthrowing the present capitalist system and establish an industrial democracy.

### **Clause Regarded as Practical Repudiation of Political Action.**

The deliberate substitution of this clause for one clearly affirming the political character of the Socialist Party was regarded as a practical repudiation of political action.

The convention itself adopted two resolutions, by a vote of 117 to 40, which definitely committed the party to another organization. These resolutions read as follows:

1. To urge all locals of the party to elect delegates to the National Conference of the Left Wing of the Socialist Party, June 21 [1919], on the basis of 1 delegate for every 500 members.
2. That the convention itself elect 2 delegates to participate in the Left Wing conference.

Your committee was unable to understand how a convention could take such action without violating the constitution, which prohibits fusion or alliance with other political organizations. It is certain that if the National Executive Committee had permitted a state organization to take such action with reference to a conference of a labor Party or some other new organization, the Left Wing would have hurled its criti-

cisms at us.

The constitution is clear on this matter and until changed there are only two courses open to the party executive. Either the offending organization must voluntarily leave the party or the party executive must remove it. If the party executive fails to act, then it must permit subdivisions of the party to send accredited delegates to Labor Parties, Non-Partisan leagues, independent parties, and any other political groups that may be organized. And if this course is permitted, disintegration is its logical end.

### **“Revolutionary Conference” Plea No Excuse of Action Taken by Massachusetts.**

It is no plea to say that this conference was a “revolutionary” conference. The principle applies to all organizations. Besides, the mere profession of ultra-revolutionary views is no criterion to judge the real character of those who utter them.

We have had the sad experience in the past 3 years of so many “revolutionists” betraying the revolution that mere lip service offers no safeguard whatever. If it were a matter of sending a fraternal delegate merely to extend greetings to some other organization, as the party sometimes does, there would be no breach of party rules, but the resolutions adopted by the state convention of Massachusetts clearly imply the sending of delegates with power to act.

The state organization of Ohio was the worst offender of all. The National Executive Committee was reluctant to act in this case, owing to the effective organization in that state and the hope that the party members would restrain their state officials and the state convention, thus permitting the Ohio organization to participate in this convention. Yet not to have acted would have been for your committee to have suspended two state organizations for violating the national constitution and to permit a third one to remain in the party though equally guilty.

The specific reasons for revoking the charter of Ohio were 3, although many more could have been cited in the [Fred] Krafft motion [to revoke the state charter]. The reasons given in the motion follow:

The official proceedings of the state convention of Ohio reveal that Article X, Section 3 of our national constitution

has been intentionally violated by the adoption of the following amendment to the Ohio constitution:

**“The name of the organization shall be the Socialist Party of Ohio, and it shall be affiliated with *that section of the Socialist Party of the United States of America which endorses the Left Wing program.*”**

By recognizing and affiliating with the suspended language federations.

By adopting a resolution that proceeds from the sale of the special assessment stamps for the national convention be, for the time, retained in the state treasury, and that part of same be disbursed for the expenses of the Ohio delegates to the National Emergency Convention.

### **Ohio Convention Was Determined To Affiliate with Left Wingers.**

It is evident that the Ohio convention was determined to affiliate with the Left Wing Section regardless of what action the Left Wing convention might take. It is equally obvious that if the Ohio delegates were admitted to our convention they had no intention of staying unless we, too, pledged ourselves to affiliate with a section whose position on various questions was yet to be determined in convention.

This section was in plain violation of Section 5 of Article 2 and Section 3(a) of Article 10 of the national constitution.

The action taken by the Ohio convention regarding the special assessment stamps was also a blow struck at the holding of this convention. The action was followed by the Ohio State Secretary [Alfred Wagenknecht] sending communications to all locals in the country urging them to send no funds to the National Office from the sale of assessment stamps.

Various other communications were sent to the other states, thus usurping the functions of the National Executive Secretary, even before the meeting of the rival “National Executive Committee” in Chicago on July 26, also called by the Ohio State Secretary [Wagenknecht].

At this Chicago meeting, resolutions were adopted urging all State Secretaries to “refrain from purchasing any more dues stamps from the former National Secretary [Adolph Germer], but that in case dues stamps are needed, such regular party dues stamps be bought from the temporary National Secretary.” The latter was the Ohio State Secretary [Wagenknecht].

### **Chicago Gathering Decided to Take Charge of Emergency Convention.**

This Chicago gathering also adopted a resolution affirming its intention of taking charge of this convention, and this was sent to all the states. For the National Executive Committee to acquiesce in all these actions would have been for its members to surrender the party organization and the convention to those responsible for them. We had to act as the National Executive Committee or vacate.

One statement is due here on the revocation of state charters. There is no specific clause in the constitution conferring power on the National Executive Committee to revoke a state charter.

Yet the National Executive Committee has the power to grant state charters, and has done so many times in the past. All such charters contain a proviso that they may be revoked when an organization violates the principles or the constitution of the party. State organizations insert a similar provision in the charters granted to locals.

To assert that an executive body has no power to recall a charter when its specific provisions have been violated, although it has the power to grant it, is to place the organization at the mercy of its subdivisions.

The principle is perfectly clear to all members when it is applied to an organization that votes to affiliate with an independent party, a citizens' party, or a labor party. But it becomes very unclear to some members when it is applied as impartially to the Left Wing Section.

If the National Executive Committee has no power to see that the fundamental reservations in charters shall be observed by the states that receive them, then the Socialist Party may be a Non-Partisan League in the Dakotas, a Labor Party in some industrial states, a citizens' party in others, and a Communist Party in still others. In other words, disintegration would set in, and a Socialist Party would be impossible.

### **Framing of Ohio Referendum Violated Constitutional Rule.**

At a joint meeting of the members of Cuyahoga County, Ohio, a national referendum was initiated to reverse the actions of the National Executive Com-

mittee in revoking the charter of Michigan, in suspending 7 language federations, and in refusing to tabulate the vote on national referendum "B" and "C."

Article 13, Section 3, of the constitution contains the following clause relating to referendums:

Referendums shall be submitted without preamble or comment. But comment not to exceed 200 words, both for and against, may accompany the motion when printed.

The first sentence of the paragraph means that when the matter is submitted to a vote it shall contain no argument whatever. The second sentence means that when it is printed in the Party Bulletin, comment, not exceeding 200 words, "both for and against," may accompany the initiative.

Whether the Cuyahoga County comrades did it deliberately or unknowingly we do not know, but in framing their resolution they did not separate what was to go on the ballot from the comment, as is usually done. On the contrary, they wove both together so that if the resolution appeared on the referendum ballot it would have carried with it comments which the constitution prohibits.

Not only would the constitution have been violated to have submitted it in this form, but the members of the National Executive Committee would have been the victims of an injustice. They would not have been able to print a comment of their own on the same ballot.

### **Resolutions Offered by Members of Ohio Local on NEC are Cited.**

The resolutions offered read as follows:

Resolved, By the joint meeting of the members of the branches of Local Cuyahoga County, representing an average of 1821 members in good standing for the year of 1918, that we initiate the following motions, to be submitted to the party membership of the United States:

Resolved, That the act of the National Executive Committee, in expelling the Socialist Party of Michigan from the Socialist Party of the United States, a state with 6,000 members, without giving the state a trial or even a hearing in its own defense, is hereby rescinded and annulled, and the Socialist Party of Michigan restored to all the rights and privileges of membership in the Socialist Party of the United States.

Resolved, That the action of the National Executive

Committee of the party in arbitrarily suspending the Russian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Lettish, Polish, South Slavic, and Hungarian federations from the party is hereby rescinded and annulled.

Resolved, That the action of the majority of the National Executive Committee, which is largely composed of candidates for re-election in the recent referendum, in holding up and refusing to tabulate the vote on referendum "B" and "C" for the election of the National Executive Committee, International Delegates, and International Secretary, and calling a national convention, is hereby rescinded and the National Secretary instructed to immediately tabulate the vote and to declare the candidates receiving the highest number of votes elected, in accordance with the national party constitution.

Resolved, That the action of the National Executive Committee in preparing to place the property of the Socialist Party in the hands of a Board of Directors, 3 to be elected for 3 years, 3 for 6 years, and 3 for 9 years, these directors not being subject to recall either by the National Executive Committee or the membership of the party, be reversed and rescinded.

It will be seen that in the second paragraph the statement is made that the National Executive Committee did not give the state of Michigan a trial "or even a hearing in its own defense." In the third paragraph it is said that the federations were "arbitrarily" suspended. To assert that this is not comment intended, or at least tending, to induce members to vote in favor of the resolutions, is to ignore the plain meaning of words.†

If some other local had initiated a referendum to sustain the National Executive Committee in these actions and had woven into the resolutions statements that the National Executive Committee had acted "justly" and those who disagreed with it acted "arbitrarily," such comments would be pleas for the adop-

tion of such resolutions and hence could not be submitted.

The submission of resolutions so worded for a vote is the very thing the constitution prohibits, as it is apparent that when so worded only one argument is before the members before they vote. Some years ago, the constitution was amended so that arguments could appear on the ballot, but it was expressly provided that both sides of the question should have an equal number of words in making their comments.

The present constitution prohibits any comment appearing on the ballot, although it may follow the initiative when appearing in the Party Bulletin. For these reasons the National Executive Committee voted not to submit these resolutions to a referendum vote.

We may here observe, also, that in the matter of the disputed elections, no member could have voted intelligently upon them without an investigation of the evidence, and there was no means of placing the evidence in the hands of every member.

This convention by a unanimous vote has accepted the report of the investigating committee which shows gross frauds. Only a body of delegates could pass intelligently on the issues involved in the disputed elections. While this observation does not carry with it any constitutional objection, it at least emphasizes the necessity of information if intelligent judgments are to be rendered. It is certain that some comrades came to the convention suspicious of the National Executive Committee in holding up the tabulation of the election returns. The vote on the report of the Investigation Committee indicates that the National Executive Committee had ample grounds for its action.

†- Speaking of "ignoring the plain meaning of words," it is to be observed that the original Local Cuyahoga County resolution printed above refers to the initiation of "the following motions [plural]" for seconds. Yet National Secretary Adolph Germer and the outgoing National Executive Committee *refused to submit all four resolutions* based upon their extremely tendentious application of the constitution to the wording of two of them. This incident merely serves as a further concrete illustration of the manner in which the SP Regular faction cloaked their Tammany Hall-style power politics in nothing more a thin veil of pseudo-legality. In reality, even after the first wave of suspensions and expulsions, the Regulars remained outnumbered among the remaining party rank and file; submission of the Local Cuyahoga resolutions for seconds would likely have resulted in short order to a referendum dealing a series of defeats to the party's discredited officialdom. The dilemma was neatly resolved by effectively suspending the constitutional provisions for referendum by refusing to submit Local Cuyahoga County's motions for seconds, and then expelling Local Cuyahoga County and the rest of the Socialist Party of Ohio in the last days before the Emergency National Convention. The taunting name used by Daniel DeLeon and his faction against their insurgent Right opponents in the 1899-1900 split of the Socialist Labor Party — "Kangaroos" — comes to mind. The epithet is a reference to the might-equals-right pseudo-legality of the "kangaroo courts" of the Wild West, a parallel which seems quite apt.

### **Charge of Packing Convention Refuted by National Executive.**

Just what specific acts are meant by this (the charge of packing the convention) we are uncertain.† The National Executive Committee objected in several cases to certain delegates being given seats in the convention, specifying in each case the reason for the objection. Some were sustained, others were not, by the convention.

We have accepted the decision of the convention in each case, at the same time admitting that the discussion and further evidence brought out showed that we were in error in some cases. In fact, events show that the entire convention was in error in the case of the California delegation, which only desired admittance to the floor long enough to tell us that they were allied with the Communist convention, not ours. From the very beginning of the convention, comrades with pronounced sympathies for the Left Wing and its program were admitted without any contest. The National Executive Committee has not attempted to exclude any delegate because of his views. It has tried to follow the constitution in every case.

In fact, a member of the National Executive Committee saved one state, Rhode Island, from committing itself to the Left Wing organization in order that its delegates might be seated in the convention. The state convention of Rhode Island was about to approve a resolution that would deprive it of its representation, and on being told that by passing it its del-

egate would not be seated, the resolution was not passed. It would have been an easy matter to let the resolution take its course and thus exclude Rhode Island if we had been anxious to exclude delegates because of their views.

In some cases, the Harwood case for example, the entire convention has exercised a good deal of tolerance and a willingness to overlook discrepancies in arriving at decisions regarding contested seats.

Aside from the constitutional reasons we have mentioned, the National Executive Committee is the trustee of the affairs of the party in between conventions. It was the duty of all comrades to abide by the decisions of the previous conventions and referenda until the party had another opportunity to express itself. We had a right to expect them to so act. When they proceeded to organize a dual organization, it was our clear duty, as the trustees of the party, to do all we could to preserve the integrity of the party.

Fraternally submitted,

*James Oneal,  
A. Shiplacoff,  
Victor L. Berger,  
George H. Goebel,  
Dan Hogan,  
John M. Work,  
Seymour Stedman,  
Frederick Krafft. ‡*

†- Delegations to the national conventions of the Socialist Party were apportioned on the basis of actually paid memberships. The entire state organizations of Michigan, Massachusetts, and Ohio, and large segments of the state organizations of New York and Pennsylvania were expelled from the party in the last weeks before the national convention but full delegations based on the number of delegates apportioned to the large pre-expulsion state parties were allowed to the small rump "reorganized" state organizations. This was viewed, with justification, as "packing." In fairness, it should be mentioned that the situation in New York and Pennsylvania (in which the purge was conducted by the state organization itself) was not as glaring as that in Michigan or Ohio (in which the hastily "reorganized" parties consisted of no more than a few hundred members, rather than thousands). A further method of packing involved the challenge on technical grounds by the Regular faction of Left Wing delegations elected by state referenda (Minnesota, California).

‡- The National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party consisted of 15 members; note that this is a bare quorum of 8. Note also that Morris Hillquit, regarded by some as the architect of the Regular faction's machinations, was not at the convention. Once again, James Oneal's name is in the first position, quite possibly indicating his primary authorship of the report. The aggressive style of presentation is certainly his.

*Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.*

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