
The Socialist Party and Moscow:

Statement Issued by the NEC in Reply to An Inquiry by the Executive Committee of the Finnish Socialist Federation.

Published in *The Socialist World* [Chicago], v. 1, no. 5 (Nov. 15, 1920), pp. 12-14.

The National Executive Committee has been requested to state clearly the attitude of the Party on the question of affiliation with the Communist International. In doing so, the committee desires to call attention to the fact that the Soviet Government of Russia and the Communist International are two entirely distinct and separate organizations. The Soviet Government was in existence eighteen months before the formation of the Communist International and its continued existence does not necessarily depend upon either the success or the failure of the Communist International.

To the Soviet Government the Socialist Party of America has given its unwavering support as evidenced by resolutions of sympathy and comradeship and by persistent and reiterated demands upon our government for the withdrawal of troops, the lifting of the blockade, the resumption of trade relations, and the recognition of the Soviet Government. This position has not been based upon our complete approval of every act and policy of the Soviet Government but upon the unquestionable right of the Russian workers to establish such a government and such administration and institutions as they deem necessary to secure and maintain their liberty and happiness.

The Communist International on the other hand has [nothing] to do with the internal affairs of the Russian people but with the interests of the revolutionary workers of the entire world. It is not only the right but the duty of the revolutionary workers of the various countries to insist upon the opportunity of participating in the organization of an international body with which they desire to affiliate and to demand a voice in determining the policies of the body of which they are to form a part.

In accordance with this principle, the Party adopted, by referendum closing May 30th, 1919, the following resolution:

Referendum "D," 1919.

"That the Socialist Party shall participate only in an International congress or conference called by or in which participate the Communist Party of Russia (Bolsheviki) and the Communist Labor Party of Germany (Spartacan)."

Following the adoption of this resolution, the Communist Party of Russia called an International Conference for the purpose of forming a new Socialist International. It did not notify the Socialist Party of the United States of the conference or invite us to send delegates. The first unofficial reports of this conference and of the formation of the Communist International were at hand when the Emergency Convention met in Chicago in 1919. Two resolutions on international affiliation were presented to this convention.

The Majority resolution provided for participation in the calling of an international conference. The object of such conference was the formation of a new International to which delegates should be invited from the Communist parties of Russian and Germany and from those Socialist parties in all countries which have remained true to the principle of the class struggle. The resolution excluded from participation any party which participates in a government coalition with parties of the bourgeoisie.

The Minority resolution provided for direct and immediate affiliation with the Communist International, making reservations in the following language:

"The Socialist Party of the United States, therefore, declares itself in support of the Third International, **not so**

much because it supports the ‘Moscow’ programs and methods, but because:

(a) ‘Moscow’ is doing something which is really challenging to world imperialism.

(b) ‘Moscow’ is threatened by the combined capitalist forces of the world simply because it is proletarian.

(c) Under these circumstances, **whatever we may have to say to Moscow afterwards**, it is the duty of Socialists to stand by it now because its fall will mean the fall of Socialist republics in Europe, and also the disappearance of Socialist hopes for many years to come.”

Both resolutions were submitted to a referendum of the membership and the Minority Resolution was adopted. Following the adoption of the Minority Resolution, the Executive Secretary on March 4, 1920, forwarded a formal application for affiliation to the Executive Committee of the Communist International in Moscow. When the National Convention met in New York on May 10th, 1920, no official communication had yet been received from Moscow, but the convention had before it unofficially various statements and declarations by the Executive Committee and by the Chairman of the Executive Committee, Zinoviev.

The New York Convention.

Two reports on international affiliation were submitted to the convention. The Majority Report, while declaring for affiliation with the Communist International, did so with the following reservations:

“In view of the above considerations, the Socialist Party of the United States, while retaining its adherence to the Third International, instructs its Executive Committee, its International Secretary, and International Delegates to be elected:

(a) To insist that no formula such as ‘the dictatorship of the proletariat’ in the form of soviets or any other special formula for the attainment of the Socialist Commonwealth be imposed or exacted as condition of affiliation with the Third International.

(b) To participate in movements looking to the union of all true Socialist forces in the world into one International, and to initiate and further such movements whenever the opportunity is presented.”

The Minority resolution was identical with that adopted by referendum following the Chicago convention. Both these resolutions were submitted to a referendum of the membership, which resulted in the adoption of the Majority Report. At the present time, and until it is changed by National Convention or ref-

erendum, the resolution last adopted states the official position of the Party. This declaration and all other declarations adopted by the Party in National Convention or by referendum vote are mandatory and binding upon this committee. We have no authority and we have no desire to assume the authority to alter or abolish them. However, the committee does consider that it has, at its discretion, a certain latitude as to time and manner in the execution of adopted policies or declarations.

At the meeting of the National Executive Committee held in Pittsburgh August 21 to 24th [1920], immediately following the adoption of the Majority resolution, the committee having in mind the uncertainty of communication, the difficulty of securing passports, the unsettled and transitional period through which the international movement is now passing, as well as the smallness of the vote cast in the referendum, exercised its discretion and adopted the following motion:

By Oneal— “In view of the extremely small vote cast in the referendum, and the slight majority by which the Majority report was adopted, that no action be taken by the Executive Committee regarding International affiliation until such time as the committee may have before it some definite proposal to be considered.”

Since the Pittsburgh meeting, however, we are in receipt of unofficial reports of resolutions and declarations adopted by the Second Congress of the Communist International containing conditions of affiliation for all parties or organizations seeking to affiliate with it. Among these conditions are the following:

2. Every organization desiring to join the Communist International shall consistently and purposefully remove from all important, and even less important positions of trust (party council, editorial staff, trade union, parliamentary factions, cooperatives, and municipal council) the reformists and centrists, and shall replace them by tried Communists, even at the risk of supplanting, for a while, experienced men by workers picked from the ranks.

3. In countries where, because of martial law and other “emergency acts,” the Communists have no opportunity to carry on action by lawful means, the pooling of lawful and unlawful action is absolutely necessary. In practically every state in Europe and America, the class struggle has reached the stage, or rather the threshold, of civil war. In this momentous period, the Communists cannot entrust their cause to bourgeois legality. **It is their duty everywhere to create, parallel with the lawful organizations, secret**

organs destined at the decisive moment to play the revolutionary role of the party.

4. We are in need of consistent and unabating propaganda and agitation. Within every group and within every unit a communist kernel must take root. **Most of this work will be unlawful**, but it would be treason against the revolutionary duty and, consequently, against the Third International to shrink therefrom.

* * *

7. Parties desirous of joining the Communist International must recognize the necessity of absolute separation from the politics indulged in by the centrists and reformists, and this severance must also be effected among members of organizations. With the fulfillment of these conditions only can there be truly consistent Communist agitation.

The Communist International, insistent and without brooking refusal, demands that this breach take place within the shortest possible time. The Communist International cannot tolerate as members of the Third International such inveterate reformists as Turatti, Modigliani, and others, lest the Third International soon become the counterpart of the Second International.

* * *

11. Parties desiring to join the Communist International must sift their parliamentary group in order to remove therefrom all uncertain elements and must place all such groups under the control of the Central Committee, and must also demand of their Communist representatives (congressional) that they place all their service at the disposal of the party for revolutionary propaganda.

12. The entire organization of periodicals and party literature shall be controlled wholly by the Central Committee **regardless of the legality or illegality of such committee. The press shall not be permitted to enjoy an autonomy** which, if abused, would result in tactics diametrically opposed to that which the party pursues.

13. Parties belonging to the Communist International must have a clear conception of the principles of democratic centralization. In this acute period of civil strife, the Communist Party can fulfill its mission only if its organization is centralized to the fullest extent, if ruled by iron discipline such as controls the military, and if its central body is vested with the widest possible power and jurisdiction, **if its authority is absolute** and enjoys the undivided confidence of the militant comrades.

14. Communist parties operating in countries where legal methods can be employed must from time to time resort to a weeding-out process within their organization in order to rid themselves of all middle-class and bourgeois elements.

* * *

16. Parties that have to this day preserved their social democratic platforms must revise the same without delay and, at the same time, draft a new program, one most suitable to the particular conditions existing in each respective country, but in harmony with the spirit of the Communist International. In instances of this sort it should be made a rule to place all parties belonging to the Communist International under the supervision of the International Congress or the Executive Committee. IN case the latter refuses the application of a party, the party in question shall have the right to appeal to the Communist International Congress.

17. Resolutions adopted by the Congress of the Third International and the Executive Committee thereof are **obligatory upon all parties belonging to the Communist International**. In this momentous period of civil strife it is imperative that the Third International be far more unified and its action far more centralized than the Second International ever has been. The Communist International and its Executive Committee must reckon with the divergent conditions of the movement in various countries, and, therefore, final and compulsory decisions can be brought only upon careful consideration.

Terms and Resolution Incompatible.

In the opinion of the committee, the conditions of affiliation are absolutely incompatible with the position of our Party as set forth in the Majority Resolution adopted by the last National Convention and approved by referendum. The committee considers these conditions impossible of acceptance by the Socialist Party of the United States. The comrades of the Communist International have assumed the right to dictate the international affairs and policies of the affiliated parties and to force upon us declarations and methods of propaganda which are inapplicable to the conditions of this country.

In the words of Comrade Eugene V. Debs, who is meeting with the committee and advising with us in the preparation of this reply:

“The Moscow program wants to commit us to a policy of armed insurrection; the Moscow comrades have arrogated to themselves the right to dictate the tactics, the program, the very conditions of propaganda of all countries. It is ridiculous, arbitrary, autocratic, as ridiculous as if we were to dictate to them how they should carry on their propaganda.”

The conditions of affiliation laid down by the Communist International are not only impossible of acceptance by our Party, but in the opinion of the committee, they are a detriment to the Soviet Government. The promulgation of these declarations at a time when opposition to the Soviet Government was lessening and strong movements existed in all Western countries for resumption of trade negotiations, was a colossal blunder. It tends to disrupt and disorganize the Socialist movements in other countries; it strengthens the reactionaries of all countries, gives them new arguments for reactionary measures of suppression, and impedes the growing tendency for resumption of trade

relations.

In view of the conditions of affiliation set forth above, and under the authority of the provisions of the Majority Report recently adopted, which is the declaration of the Party's position, this committee is now authorized to participate in or initiate a movement for the formation of a genuine International Socialist organization. However, we feel that the conditions existing at the time of the Pittsburgh meeting have not changed to any great extent and this committee will therefore await further developments or the receipt of definite proposals from European parties before taking any action relating to international affiliation.

Edmund T. Melms,
George E. Roewer, Jr.,
James Oneal,
Bertha H. Mailly,
W.M. Brandt,
W.H. Henry,
John Hagel.

National Executive Committee, Socialist Party.

Otto Branstetter,
Executive Secretary.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2005. • Free reproduction permitted.