
The Detroit Resolution

by James Oneal

First published in *Der Wecker* [New York: Jewish Socialist Verband], Sept. 1921.
Reprinted in the *New York Call*, v. 14, no. 262 (Sept. 19, 1921), pg. 7.

One of the striking things about the resolution adopted at the Detroit convention of the Socialist Party [June 25-29, 1921] regarding the relations of the party to other working class organizations is that it has caused little comment in the party press. The resolution appeared to have the almost unanimous support of the delegates, only 2 voting against it. Even the small “Left” voted in favor of it.



This resolution instructed the National Executive Committee to make a survey of other organizations of the workers to ascertain whether an arrangement could be made with them to “cooperate with the Socialist movement upon a platform not inconsistent with that of the party, and on a plan which will preserve the integrity and autonomy of the Socialist Party.”

The National Executive Committee has followed the instruction given by the convention and has sent a questionnaire to organizations of the working class. It has no power to act upon the answers it receives. It can only report the information it gathers to the national convention next year. The convention will then decide whether it desires to go further or whether the responses will justify further action.

If the convention and the membership approve and the number of favorable answers re-

ceived warrant it, what would follow would be a national conference of all working class organizations, including labor unions, cooperatives, fraternal organizations, etc., that stand committed to independent political action of the workers. This conference would have to consider whether it is possible to organize on the same basis as the British Labour Party and agree upon a Socialist objective as its goal. If agreement can be reached upon these two points the Socialist Party would become an affiliated member of the organization, retaining its own local, state, and national organizations; its own press and literature; conduct its own propaganda, and in every way remain what it is now.

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The one exception should be that, as is the case in England, all affiliated organizations would unite upon candidates in every local, state, and national election. These candidates would represent the united organizations that have accepted the rules and objective of the working class coalition. In England, whether the candidate is a member of the Independent Labour Party or any other Socialist organization, whether he is a member of an affiliated trade union or cooperative society, he wages the contest in the name of the Labour Party. The same procedure would be taken here.

It should be remembered that Lenin advised the British Communists to become affiliated with

the British Labour Party and the Communist Party made application for admission. It was rejected, but it would likely have been admitted if the British Communists had not indulged in a tirade of abuse and vilification as they have in this country. But because Lenin advised this policy is no reason why we should adopt it. We should consider the matter solely on its merits, regardless of whether Lenin had ever approved of it.

My own conclusion is that if we obtain the adhesion of organizations of the workers, representing [less than] 2 million members, it is doubtful whether we should go any further with the proposal. That, however, is a matter for the next convention to decide. If 2 million, or nearly that number, members are to be found in organizations agreeing upon this political coalition then it would be advisable to go ahead. If the large and powerful Jewish unions, such organizations as the Auto Workers, the Machinists, the United Mine Workers in many districts and states, the cooperatives and insurance organizations of the working class, as well as the Farmer-Labor Party, were to affiliate, it is likely that more than 2 million workers would be mobilized for united political action.

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I have been asked whether the proposal includes such groups as the Committee of 48 and the Non-Partisan League of farmers. My answer is that it does not include the first organization. In the case of the Non-Partisan League the committee was of the opinion that as this organization works within the capitalist parties it could not be accepted in the proposed organization. Its action cannot be reconciled with independent political action of the working class. However, it was reported that a large section of the radical farmers are breaking away from their Republican and Democratic connections. It was therefore decided to send the questionnaire to the Non-

Partisan League of farmers. It is not likely, however, that it will give a favorable answer to the questionnaire, as the first condition of the proposal is political action of the working class independent of and opposed to the parties of capitalism.

One advantage of the British form of political organization of the workers is that it throws the Socialists into intimate contact with other organizations of the working class and brings these workers into contact with us. For a generation the Socialist movement of the United States has been cursed with theoreticians and dogmatists. This has been largely due to the fact that as an organization we have been isolated from the reality of working class life and its problems. Our intentions have been of the best, but proletarian life has been a matter of theory to many who have ascended as leaders, writers, and speakers of the party. Unless the Socialist movement is made part of the working class, unless it becomes intimately rooted in proletarian life, its tendency cannot be otherwise than to develop a priesthood guarding a sacred cult. The frequent quarrels we have had in the past 20 years over doctrinal creeds is evidence of the influence of isolation from proletarian life on the Socialist Party.

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During the past 3 years there has been no less than a dozen Communist priesthoods developing out of the first "split" in the Socialist Party. Recently another collection of monks left the Jewish Socialist Federation. All of them have devoted themselves, like all priestcraft, to the formation of a ritual and articles of faith. How will the proletariat be saved? Each of the dozen collection of Communist monks quarrel over this question. Each has a sacred and infallible way of salvation.

But the proletariat they seek to save is a proletariat they do not know and will never know. They mumble over dogma while the proletariat is involved in a struggle for life. While the Commu-

nist monks dispute how many angels can dance on the point of a needle, the proletariat is bathed in sweat and struggles with the capitalist class. One glorious struggle like that waged by the Amalgamated Clothing Workers surpasses in value all the disputes of the monks regarding salvation by underground organization or the future of a dictatorship of these monks.

In the proletarian struggle is life, is reality, is battle, is joy, and the creation of the future commonwealth of the working class. The monk of the monastery and the nun of the nunnery know nothing and can know nothing of life and battle. They can only indulge in introspective brooding, because the working class does not follow them to their underground altars and burn incense in honor of the Communist ritual.

I use this analogy advisedly. I know nothing in modern times that bears a closer resemblance to the greasy monks of another time than the Communists of various stripes, and there are certainly a dozen at least.

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I have no fear of any policy that brings the Socialist Party into closer contact with the working class, its organizations, its struggles, and its problems. I fear any tendency toward any approach to the enemies of the working class, the

exploiters of labor and their parties of capitalism. The working class may make mistakes. So have we. But, mistaken or not, I am for the working class. The Socialist movement is for and of the working class. It is either that or it, too, is possessed of the cowl and rope of the greasy monk.

The class struggle is not a theory but a fact, not a dogma but a grim reality. Out in the mines, the steel hells, in sweating dens of the exploiters, and everywhere that our class is drained of its vitality, there is the class struggle. Get in it. Be of it. Know its reality and the theory will take care of itself. Brood over the theory and the reality will escape you and you will escape it.

If the Socialist Party proposal should crystallize in organization it would carry more than political solidarity with it. It would bring us into more intimate relation with every phase of the class struggle than hitherto. The variety of struggles into which we would be drawn in behalf of working class power and solidarity would swamp the tacticians, magicians, monks, theoreticians, and generalissimos with which we have been cursed for several years. The actualities of working class life and its struggles would sweep them aside with elemental power and leave them to chant their dirges to each other as the working class goes on its way.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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