
The Chicago Conventions.

by Barbara Hale White

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The great experiment is ended. For three years the Socialist Party had sought to establish some medium through which it could work in cooperation with other groups clearly committed to the principles of industrial democracy. It had hoped that the Conference for Progressive Political Action was such a medium, and in every way possible sought to strengthen the Conference. During the year preceding the convention at the Lexington Hotel in Chicago, February 21st [1925], it had seemed possible to align a considerable number of the trade unions in the formation of a political party supporting a labor program in opposition to the Republican and Democratic Parties.

When the convention of the Conference opened on Saturday, February 21st, the spokesman for the Railroad Brotherhoods [L.E. Sheppard, President of the Order of Railway Conductors] offered a motion opposing the formation of a political party. Morris Hillquit then offered the following amendment:

The delegates to this convention hereby resolve that a new political party be organized on the following lines:

1. The name of the party shall be American Labor Party.

The term labor to imply all workers, agricultural as well as industrial, mental as well as manual, and all other citizens who accept the social and political ideals and aspirations of the producing classes.

2. The party shall consist of state organizations constituted on geographical lines in conformity with the election laws of the different states, but the National Committee and all State and Local Committees may also admit direct affiliation of organizations of workers and farmers and of progressive political and educational groups who fully accept its program and principles.

3. It shall be definitely committed to the principles of industrial and political democracy and the platform planks of the progressive political platform in the campaign of 1924.

4. It shall uniformly nominate candidates of its own for public office in consistent opposition to the Republican and Democratic Parties.

5. A National Organization Committee shall be elected by this convention charged with the task of organizing state

parties on the principles above outlined.

6. A National Convention composed of delegates from state organizations and affiliated groups shall be called by the committee in the month of October 1925 for the purpose of perfecting the organization of the party in all practical details.

7. The National Organization Committee shall fix the exact dates, the place, and basis of representation of the convention.

Throughout the day's session the Socialist delegates supported the Hillquit amendment. With them were the delegates of a number of the more forward unions, but it was plain that the majority of those present did not represent organization strength and desired a party formed along lines quite unacceptable to the Socialist Party inasmuch as the plan favored individual membership and would mean, in practical application, the extinction of the organized Socialist movement in the United States.

Toward the close of the afternoon's session, the following motion by Hillquit was adopted unanimously:

"Resolved, That this Conference for Progressive Political Action adjourn sine die in order to give all those delegates who favor the formation of a third party an opportunity to reconvene in separate convention this evening and transact whatever business they may see fit to transact."

The Conference for Progressive Political Action adjourned. Those favoring the formation of a party assembled for an evening session during which the question was discussed without result other than the appointment of a committee of seven to consider the motions and several amendments and report at the Sunday morning session.

Upon convening Sunday morning [Feb. 22], six of the seven members submitted the following report:

Resolved, That the party shall consist of state organizations constituted on geographical lines in conformity with the election laws of the different states. Such state organizations shall be autonomous and shall be formed on such lines as the states respectively shall determine.

Resolved further, That the cooperation be sought of all organizations which in the last campaign supported the independent candidate and of those members of the Senate and House of Representatives who are ready to join in the promotion of such a party.

Resolved further, That in a national convention hereafter to be called, the delegates from the several states be proportioned to the aggregate number of votes cast under all party designations for the Independent Progressive candidate for the Presidency in the last election.

It was inevitable that a minority report should be made, since the differences between the groups were irreconcilable. George E. Roewer Jr., representing the Socialist viewpoint, submitted the second proposition of the Hillquit amendment, as follows:

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After fruitless discussion, a motion to table the minority report carried by a vote of 93 to 64, and the majority report was then adopted.

The future course of the Socialist Party was never in doubt. At a great mass meeting held during the afternoon, at which Eugene V. Debs was principal speaker, it was pointed out that while the policy of the party includes cooperation, it would no longer delay for it. Already the sacrifice was considerable and the results meager. American Labor as represented in the convention certainly is not ready for independent political action. The Railroad Brotherhoods' decision to return to their former policy of supporting candidates of the Republican and Democratic Parties according as their particular interests might seem to indicate, made it quite evident that a party of labor would not originate with the Conference. It was thus clear that our affiliation with that body could in no way enlarge our opportunity for reaching the masses of the workers.

When the Socialist Party Convention opened Monday morning [Feb. 23] at the Douglas Park Au-

ditorium, it was no less evident that the delegates were weary of expending effort without securing adequate results and that they were eager to brush aside anything and everything that might interfere with work for the Socialist Party. They raised high the banner of Socialism, planted it aloft with a glorious enthusiasm, and accepted the welcome task of planning for a greater party, determined to concentrate upon that one splendid purpose alone.

Now that the Socialist Party convention is over, reviewing its deliberations nothing seems more significant than the unbroken unanimity of its sessions. As soon as the convention was organized by Chairman Hillquit, the delegates were addressed by National Chairman Eugene V. Debs, followed by Raphael Abramovich, member of the Executive of the Socialist and Labor International. Before the noon adjournment a subcommittee on party policy was elected and it was ready with its report early in the afternoon session. There was no minority report, and the one presented was brief and to the point. It provided that the Socialist Party should not affiliate with the new party formed the preceding day. Adopted with no dissenting votes. It provided for the withdrawal of the Socialist Party from the Conference for Progressive Political Action. Unanimously approved. And it also permitted cooperation between the Socialist Party in bona fide Labor Parties in the various states, but such cooperation must be referred to and approved by the National Executive Committee and such approval will in no case be given unless the political integrity of the Socialist Party is maintained. Which means that the party must have its own candidates upon the ballot under all circumstances.

The banquet tendered the delegates with Eugene V. Debs as specially honored guest was a joyous affair and a fitting climax to the day's work. The relief and satisfaction of those present in knowing that the trying period of uncertainty had been brought to a conclusion was unbounded. Leo M. Harkins, National Executive Committeeman from New Jersey, was invited to speak and he told of the great work Comrade Debs had volunteered to do — to clear the national organization from the burden of debt and create a fund to begin a great program of party building. The response was immediate and amazing. Over seven hundred dollars was piled upon the table in front of Com-

rade Debs and in a short time pledges brought the total of five thousand dollars — enough when paid to clear away the last obligation upon the National Office, and the fund for party building will now have Comrade Debs' undivided attention.

Generosity was the spirit of the gathering. Through the Wisconsin delegates, \$1,000 was pledged. *The Daily Forward*, \$1,200. Pittsburgh had already made pledges for the year of approximately a thousand dollars. Through Comrade Van Essen, \$500 more was pledged. The contributions came so fast it was impossible to record all the givers. Among the party organization pledgers are Locals Philadelphia, Bergen and Essex County, NJ, Covington, Ky., the Chicago Jewish Verband, the Italian and Yugoslav Federations. We cannot give a list until it is verified for we must not risk leaving out a single one of those generous pledgers and contributors — many of them know wherever Socialists gather together and many others known only here in Chicago where they have been the life and soul of the movement for years. But looking down the list we find names that are inspiration for the future — the Fur Workers, the Amalgamated, the Cloak Workers Joint Board of Chicago, among oth-

ers. The contributors were modest in making their offerings — a check for a hundred dollars, signed by a name not immediately identified, was a puzzle until it was known that it came from the Workmen's Circle.

Among the list of pledgers we missed one name — that of John T. Whitlock of Chicago, member of the last National Campaign Committee, who has been a most generous supporter of all party undertakings. This absence was explained the next morning when Comrade Whitlock appeared and told how he had been prevented from attending and announced his own pledge of \$1,000.

Who was it predicted that the “Chicago Convention” would be the finish of the Socialist Party? The Chicago Convention is over and it leaves the Socialist Party solidly united in purpose, hopeful and confident for the task at hand, more truly militant than ever before. There is no “new” Labor Party. But the Socialist Party is clearly revealed as the one political party in the United States organized to defend and promote the interests of the producing classes. To this cause it has given unwavering allegiance for 24 years. Today as always, the Socialist Party is the one party of the working class.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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