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# Socialist NEC Lifts Charter in New York State

## [Events of Jan. 4-5, 1936]

Published in *The Socialist Call* [New York], vol. 1, no. 43 (Jan. 11, 1936), pp. 3-4.

PHILADELPHIA.— Acting for the restoration of Socialist democracy and discipline within the Party, the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party in a dramatic two-day session here voted by an overwhelming majority to suspend the charter of the state organization in New York and appointed a temporary State Committee of 15 to reorganize the Party.

The resolution, moved by Darlington Hoopes of Pennsylvania after consultation with Albert Sprague Coolidge of Massachusetts, passed 8-2. It also provides for a sub-committee of the NEC to supervise the reorganization and appoints Devere Allen of Connecticut, Leo Krzycki of Wisconsin, and Coolidge as the committee.

The resolution was a compromise which guarantees full party democracy to all groups and full membership writes to all members within the state. It is printed in full on this page.

Members of the temporary State Committee, to serve only until a new state convention can be held are:

Lewis Tonks, Schenectady, Chairman; Warrin Atkinson, Rochester; Leo Brushingham, Olean; Emily Lovett Eaton, Syracuse; Carlotta Kinsley, Oneida; George Dimmick, Rome; Newton Jones, Utica; William G. Perry, Elmira; Harold Raitt, Buffalo; and Murray Baron, Joseph Baskin, Frank Crosswaith, Winston Dancis, Max Delson, Charles Garfinkel, Adolph Held, Abraham Miller, Simon Berlin, William Bohn, Murray Gross, and Joseph Stein, all of New York.

Of the 12 New Yorkers on the committee, three — Delson, Baron, and Gross — have been identified with the “Militant” group, five — Baskin, Held, Miller, Berlin, and Bohn — are closely connected with either the Rand School or the Jewish Daily Forward Association. The NEC also provided alternates in case any of the above should be unable to serve.

### **Allen Withdraws Motion.**

Prior to the final action, Devere Allen, one of those who later voted for the compromise, introduced a resolution specifically recognizing the State Committee elected by the Emergency State Convention recently held in Utica. Declaring that he did so in the interests of harmony and unity in the party, Allen subsequently withdrew his motion and supported the Hoopes-Coolidge resolution.

After two days of thorough discussion of the situation, which all members of the committee agreed had brought “chaos, disruption, and disintegration” into the Socialist ranks, the NEC voted as follows:

**For the motion: National Chairman Krzycki, Allen, Coolidge, and Hoopes; Franz Daniels, Pennsylvania; Powers Hapgood, Indiana; Maynard C. Krueger, Illinois; and Norman Thomas, New York.**

**Against the motion: James Oneal, New York, and James Graham, Montana.**

### **Oneal Denounces NEC.**

Throughout the hearing, Oneal had insisted that any conclusive action by the NEC at that time was “unconstitutional, illegal, and unprecedented.” After the committee reached its decision, he rose, read a denunciatory “prepared in advance,” and formally withdrew from the committee sessions.

Although Thomas and others of the Utica State Committee had announced their willingness to go along with any proposal that would guarantee complete democracy in the New York state party, the deposed “Old Guard” State Committee, headed by Louis Waldman, answered the NEC’s invitation to appear before it only by a letter of refusal.

Oneal offered an alternative motion intended to postpone all action for at least one month, but he and Graham were its only supporters. The motion would have given the deposed committee one month more in which to reply to charges in writing.

## **Continues Jurisdiction.**

“Constitutionality” was Oneal’s defense throughout the meeting. The question of the jurisdiction of the committee was settled even before the hearings on the New York matter opened. George Goebel, a suspended right wing Socialist from New Jersey, came before the committee to appeal from what he termed “a matter of vital importance to the party, the question of his status as a member.”

On motion of Thomas, the NEC appointed a subcommittee of three to mediate and to protect all democracy and individual rights in the case. The motion was passed with only Oneal dissenting.

When the NEC began its hearings on the New York situation, Oneal again argued that the case was “out of order,” except on 30 days’ notice. Pointing out that the matter had been continuously before the committee for “many 30 days,” and that an emergency now faced the party, Thomas moved “that the NEC continues jurisdiction of the entire New York state situation, that due notice has been given, and that all matters in New York are therefore properly before us.”

With Thomas pointing out that Oneal himself had set the precedent for the committee’s action when in 1919 he moved to revoke the charter of the Massachusetts State Committee for communist tendencies in that state, the motion was carried, 7-1. Hoopes explained that he voted for the motion because “an emergency requires it. For the NEC to ignore it would be a crime.”

## **Refuse to Appear.**

At the request of Oneal, Marx Lewis, acting as “messenger” for the Waldman committee, then read that committee’s “answer” to the invitation by Clarence Senior, National Secretary of the party, to appear before the meeting here. In its letter, the deposed New York committee pleaded that it was “not aware” of the NEC’s decision to act in the situation, characterized the whole procedure as a “farce,” and declared that it would “stand upon its rights” by refusing to send any representative to appear before the NEC. Hapgood, however, charged that “the committee has not shown up, because they have no case.”

Reporting on the Utica conference, Senior listed 17 locals, in addition to the New York City local, as voting to set up a new State Committee. With 3 other locals present but not voting because their

representatives were without authority, he said, the membership represented was about 500 out of a total of 700 in the upstate area. Since the Utica conference, one of the three locals not voting endorsed the Utica committee. Two other locals not represented at Utica sent letters approving the conference.

Appearing before the committee "by virtue of a resolution of a state convention more representative than the 1934 convention of the party in New York state, Max Delson, State Chairman chosen at Utica, introduced as his first witness Dr. Louis Sadoff of New York. Sadoff declared the issue to be: "Are we to have a Socialist Party in New York State? It is our contention that the other committee, the Waldman committee, has forfeited its right to represent the Socialist Party in that state."

### **Berenberg Presents Case.**

To prove this, David P. Berenberg, of Brooklyn, then read the official memorandum of the case of the Utica State Committee. Declaring the party to be faced with its gravest crisis since 1919, the statement said in part:

The Old Guard in New York has precipitated an emergency in which only the vigorous action of New York comrades has saved the party from being shattered into fragments. As a result of a threatened purge under the guise of reorganization, which would have left the party stripped of all its vital elements, a revolt of the party membership has resulted in the establishment of a new party apparatus. On behalf of the new State Committee of New York, and the City Central Committee of Local New York, we request that the National Executive Committee shall recognize the emergency which now exists and the fact that the old committees by their illegal, unsocialist, and undemocratic acts of usurpation have forfeited their charters.

Because of the conditions prevailing in the state which have become more chaotic than ever before as a result of the administration's acts of omission and commission, a conference of party locals was held in Utica on December 28 and 29 [1935]. The conference included official representatives from almost every existing and functioning local in the state. Without a negative vote but with the delegates of three locals abstaining for lack of authority, the body voted to meet the crisis existing in the state organization by assuming the responsibilities of an Emergency State Convention and by electing a State Committee, pledged to

carry out Socialist organization work in New York, in harmony and cooperation with the national organization.

### **Truly Representative.**

The Utica convention was truly representative of the organized Socialists of this state, surely more representative of the organized Socialists of this state than the old State Committee, which it replaced by a committee which will function for Socialism. We ask the National Executive Committee to give full force and effect to the steps taken by the New York comrades to preserve the party in this hour of crisis.

**Because of the fact that the old State Committee has violated the national constitution and its own state constitution, and has permitted local bylaws to be violated, the New York party membership has acted to restore discipline and democracy. As the State Committee elected by the Utica convention which is representative of the wishes of the party membership, we ask the NEC to recognize us as the official body authorized to conduct the business of the Socialist Party of New York.**

We believe that in spite of the damage that has been done to the party in the past year and a half by the old committees, the situation is still hopeful for the growth of the movement. To save the party with all its rich potentialities, the National Executive Committee must recognize the Utica convention and its state committee which pledges to the national organization its wholehearted support.

### **No Purge Wanted.**

Denying that the Utica committee wished in any way to emulate the old State Committee in its attitude toward party democracy, Sadoff explained:

**“We are not here to ask you to expel anyone in New York. We say that all those who subscribe to the party’s constitution and Declaration of Principles and abide by majority decisions have a right in the party.”**

Reiteration of the same pledge was made by Jack Altman, Executive Secretary of the New York local, when he said, “We are asking no one to purge the party. We come to ask you to save the party.”

## Describes Purge.

An explanation of the inclusive party for which the new committee was asking came dramatically from the lips of Harold Raitt, President of the Buffalo Carpenters' Union.

After describing the purge conducted by Robert Hoffman and Oneal in expelling without trial 24 members of the party in that city, Raitt asked for recognition of the newly formed local with which he is identified.

"Give us a chance and we'll build you a Socialist Party, not a lot of paper locals."

**Graham asked: "If you are given this chance to build the party, will you take in Hoffman?"**

**"We'll take in all the members of the old organization," Raitt answered. "We'll even take in Hoffman, and make a Socialist out of him."**

## "Peace" Plans Presented.

On Sunday morning [Jan. 5, 1936] representatives of two groups in New York came before the committee with plans for "unity and harmony," one from the Forward Association, represented by Held, and the other from a centrist group, headed by Sam Friedman, formerly labor editor of *The New Leader*. Both Held and Friedman presented substantially the same plan: new elections or a referendum in the state on the basis of proportional representation for all groups.

Admitting that he spoke only for his committee and not for the *Forward*, Held stated:

"There is very little difference in the party on the question of armed insurrection and the united front. That is not the issue. A number of organizational problems have come to the front, and require solution."

Held said he was not familiar with all the details of the problems, but suggested negotiations with the "Old Guard." Norman Thomas, he said, had never blocked peace in any way and did not participate in a united front when he debated Earl Browder in Madison Square Garden last month.

## **Opposes Referendum.**

Pressed to express himself on the Held proposals, Oneal again appealed to constitutionality and declared angrily: "I can not commit the state organization to any proposal. I can not tell what the reaction would be. Personally, I think there is no reason for a referendum in the state of New York."

## **Peace Offer or a Threat?**

Joseph Bearak of Boston, claiming to represent the State Committee of that state, demanded that the NEC drop the whole matter and turn it over to an Eastern States Conference to which he said, nine state organizations in the East had been invited to send delegates. When Bearak had finished, Hoopes remarked dryly: "You say you want peace in the party. We had difficulty in telling whether you were making a peace proposal or a threat."

Outlining the "frustration, chaos, and disintegration in the Socialist party because this fight has been going on," Sam Friedman declared he was "disappointed" in Oneal's unwillingness to meet Held's proposals, and went on: "If the Old Guard leaves the party, the responsibility will be theirs."

**Again pressed for an opinion on the "peace" proposals, Oneal closed the door to the referendum idea by declaring: "The proposal implies a flaunting of the constitution of the Socialist Party. My reaction is that I am very doubtful that it would be accepted by the State Committee."**

In an "appeal to maintain unity and the public integrity of the Socialist Party," Sarah Lilmbach, State Secretary of the Pennsylvania party, suggested that charges be made formal and asked that the State Committee be asked to appeal to answer the charges. Chairman Krzycki was forced to announce once more, however, that "the state of New York apparently does not desire to appear at this time."

## **Garfinkel Speaks.**

Again resuming the case for the Utica committee, Delson introduced Charles Garfinkel, former Socialist Assemblyman and temporary Chairman of the newly reorganized local in New York. Dealing with the issue of "constitutionality," Garfinkel declared that "any

group which waits until it is executed is crazy, or at any rate immature. If you of the NEC do not act, you will be responsible for a party split.”

At this juncture written evidence of the strength and virility of the newly reorganized local in New York was presented by Lou Hay, party organizer, who showed the NEC signed registration cards of party members, who have formally declared their allegiance to the Socialist City Central Committee at 21 East 17th Street. In addition he presented over 300 signed application cards received during the last 4 weeks. Hay also brought the signed records of the branch voting in New York City, constituting a devastating indictment of “figures” previously issued by the Old Guard.

### **Oneal Says “War is On!”**

With this evidence before it, the committee began its deliberations. Oneal was the first to speak, occupying an hour and 15 minutes to renew his plea of unconstitutionality, to charge “incompetency of those (Thomas and others) who claim they know how to build the party,” and to repeat his claim of armed insurrectionists in the party.

**“Your organization will have to go underground,” he charged. “The war is on! We are at the parting of ways. You can not get the heart and soul of the organized workers, but we can.”**

### **Allen Replies.**

Answering the issues raised by Oneal, Allen, who headed an investigation committee on the question of “armed insurrection” last year, declared:

“I saw no evidence that any reliable member of the party endorsed armed insurrection. The endorsement of armed insurrection is repugnant to me personally. I have spent over 20 years fighting it myself. I utterly repudiate the issue of armed insurrection as a central issue. I know it is irrelevant. There is but one question, the question of democracy in the Socialist ranks.”

Proposing “a drastic but helpful act, surrounded by safeguards which would guarantee that an inclusive party emerge,” Allen then moved his resolution to “recognize as the official State Committee of New York, the State Committee organized by the Socialist convention at Utica.” The resolution differed in several other respects from the

one finally adopted, providing in general the same safeguards of party democracy, but definitely charging the old state organization with “continued disloyalty,” “violation of the peace pact agreed upon with the National Executive Committee last July,” and “usurpation of power.”

### **Graham Asks Mediation.**

The Allen motion was opposed by Graham, who instead suggested that a joint committee of Militants and Old Guardists, with an NEC member as chairman, be set up to mediate the fight. “Possibly if I had been a Militant I would have walked out of the City Central Committee myself, but the Militants have not exhausted every constitutional means,” he said.

### **Coolidge Offers Substitute.**

Charging that in handing over the prize to the Militants, “we would wave a red flag in the face of the Old Guard,” Coolidge then offered a substitute, embodying substantially the terms of the Hoopes motion later adopted. Coolidge refused to recognize the Utica committee as the State Committee of New York.

Hapgood supported the Allen motion and charged that the only reason the Old Guard refused to appear before the NEC was “the hope that they would simply wear out the patience of the younger members and of the NEC.

**“For many months,” he said, “there has been deliberate sabotage of the national organization by the New York State Committee. I support the Allen motion because I do not think the amendment will take care of the situation. The time has come for action by the NEC.”**

“We can all agree,” answered Hoopes, “that the situation is difficult. Things can not go on as they have been going on. Technically there is a case that we haven’t the case properly before us; also, it is true that the NEC must act.

“I believe Coolidge’s amendment provides a possible method of settlement. If it fails we will fight it out in the National Convention.”

## Krueger Raps Job Machine.

Terming the old organization in New York a "Tammanyized job machine unknown anywhere else in the Socialist Party in this country," Krueger spoke in support of the Allen motion.

**"It is my opinion that the charter has been forfeited by the State Committee's own acts. For two years we put up with dilatory action that is partly responsible for the situation today. The thing has gone far enough. The NEC must step in and recognize the only group that are the hope for building the Socialist Party in New York state and in the nation. We have the honor of being the NEC that cleans up that New York situation."**

After a vote on Oneal's motion had been defeated, 7 to 2, with only Oneal and Graham supporting it, Hoopes introduced the final motion, which was accepted by Allen "in the interests of harmony and unity." With Allen's motion withdrawn, the Hoopes motion became the only motion before the NEC.

Before the vote was taken, however, Chairman Krzycki summed up the reasons making action necessary.

**"The position taken by the comrades on 15th Street (the Rand School) has gone very far in setting up a destructive paralysis in the Socialist Party. First the Declaration of Principles was made an issue and kept alive for months. When that issue was finally disposed of in a referendum, a new issue was created, the united front with communists.**

**"Yes, I agree with those comrades who say that large numbers of party members have been kept from doing their work to build the party by these tactics. I hope in this resolution we will find sufficient material to hammer out effectively functioning machinery for building the party in New York state."**

As soon as the Hoopes motion had been approved, Coolidge presented nominations for the new temporary committee of 15 (6 more were added at a later session.) Oneal then read the statement which he explained he had "prepared in advance." After denouncing the action taken as "unconstitutional" and "arbitrary," he announced that he would "refuse to participate in the farce of these sessions," and immediately withdrew from the meeting room.

Near midnight Sunday, the NEC closed its sessions in this city, after naming the committee of 3. All sessions were held before a crowd of nearly 300 party members from all parts of the country who

jammed the meeting hall at the Philadelphia Labor Institute to overflowing.

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### ***The NEC Resolution***

*The following motion by Darlington Hoopes of Pennsylvania was passed by a vote of 8-2 at the last meeting of the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party:*

Whereas the Socialist Party of New York State is split into two nearly equal groups, and

Whereas in this emergency the regular state and local machinery has proved itself unable to preserve and build a united vigorous party, and

Whereas a clear path must be opened for a party inclusive of all Socialist elements and the restoration of party democracy;

Therefore, the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party of the United States hereby suspends the charter of the present Socialist Party of New York and appoints a temporary State Committee of 15, and provides for the reorganization of the party in New York State, New York City, and Buffalo in accordance with the following stipulations:

1. That the NEC, in order to safeguard party democracy in New York state, shall immediately establish a non-factional supervisory committee of 3 charged with the responsibility of carrying out the following provisions:

(a) All red-card holders to be admitted without question to the reorganized party provided they signify their desire for inclusion prior to February 7 [1936];

(b) All outstanding applications to be passed upon before February 7; all future applications to be acted upon within 30 days of their signature by the applicant; each application rejected by a local branch to be filed immediately upon its rejection with the supervisory committee, which shall have full power to order acceptance of such applicants in accordance with the provisions of Section 2 below.

(c) Arrangements to be made to guarantee fair election of delegates to the national convention immediately following February 7.

(d) Elections, to be under rules guaranteeing just rights of all members, for the New York City Central Committee within the month following February 7.

(e) Provision to be made for equitable and proportional representation as a basis of representation in the New York City Central and City Executive Committees.

(f) A new and representative state convention to be held prior to June 30, 1936 at a date fixed by the supervisory committee.

(g) The State Committee to take steps following February 7 to see that all its sub-committees are fairly representative of different groups in the state.

(h) The NEC will fill any vacancies in the State Committee during the period of reorganization.

2. Finally, and most important of all, the NEC directs that the State Committee see that:

(a) There be no additions to or subtractions from the provisions of the national constitution for membership in the party.

(b) There be no "purges," no heresy hunting, but an enforcement of loyalty in act to the constitution, platform, and declaration of principles.

(c) The democratic right of discussion within the party of its policies be protected in every instance.

*Edited by Tim Davenport*

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