
In Re: Communist Party Convention [Chicago: Sept. 1-7, 1919]

by N. Nagorowe
[BoI “Confidential Employee No. 121”]†

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Report Made by: A.H. Loula
Place Where Made: Chicago, Ill.
Date When Made: Sept. 22, 1919.
Period for Which Made: Sept. 19, 1919.

*Title of Case and Offense Charged
or Nature of Matter Under Investigation:*

**In Re Communist Party Convention
Report of Confidential Employee No. 121.
Communist Matter.**

*Statement of Operations, Evidence Collected, Names and
Addresses of Persons Interviewed, Places Visited, Etc.:*

At Chicago.

Confidential Employee No. 121, who, pursuant to instructions of Division Superintendent Edward J. Brennan, caused himself to be elected a regular delegate from Gary, Ind., to the Communist Party Convention held at Chicago from September 1st to 7th, inclusive, submits the following report:

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September 17, 1919.

I have somewhat delayed this report, not by reason of my own negligence, but because I have been

awaiting additional information of importance which the Secretary of the Party [C.E. Ruthenberg] has promised to send all delegates, including the list of the newly elected Executive Committee, the names of whom we failed to put down in the heat of the discussion on the floor at that time. For some reason the promised “additional matter of importance” has not been received yet. I, therefore, now submit my report, and shall forward later all additional information they may supply.

**The Communist Party Convention
at Chicago, Sept. 1-7, 1919.**

The unusual fact of two Communist Conventions at the same time, and at the same place, for practically the same purpose and the same program of work, is the result of the Left Wing Conference held in New York on June 21st [1919], a Conference which resulted in a split, the majority announcing its intention to capture the convention and machinery of the Socialist Party in Chicago on September 1st, the minority resolved to organize a new party, a Communist Party.‡ This minority — radical and aggressive — consisted mainly of the Foreign Language Federations, under the leadership of the Russian Federation, a purely Bolshevik organization, but which had been connected with the Socialist Party merely to more safely carry on its work in the United States.§ At that Left Wing Conference in New York the Russian Federation considered it the psychological occasion to form a straight

†- Identification based on information from the same BoI film that “Confidential Employee No. 121” was elected by Branch No. 2, Gary, Indiana. The other delegate from Gary was Steve Benkowich, who was elected by the much larger of 2 branches.

‡- Actually, the convention of the Socialist Party of America convened on August 30, 1919, two days before the scheduled start of the founding convention of the Communist Party of America.

§- There is no known evidence verifying this as the motivation of the Russian Federation for affiliating with the SPA.

Communist Party in America. Among the American delegates at the Left Wing Conference, the Fraina group and the Michigan delegates threw in their lot with the Russian Federation.

These 3 groups, then, have been instrumental in calling the Communist Party Convention now. Most of the credit is accorded the Michigan group.

Now, when the delegates to the Communist Party assembled, the Left Wingers, having failed in their attempt to “capture” the old Socialist Party Convention in a body, and having been bodily thrown out there, have decided to join the Communist Party Convention in a body, on a basis of “equality in the Unity Conference.” †

This tangle was the immediate business on hand when the Communist Party Convention opened on September 1, 1919.

In this report I shall confine myself to the treatment of all matters of importance that took place BEHIND CLOSED DOORS only, however giving such necessary information as might be necessary in order to understand the significance of the proceedings. The speeches and discussions engaged in, and the decisions arrived at, at the public hearings, as well as the minutes and reports of the various Committees which were mimeographed and freely distributed in the hall, I shall here omit, as I understand that all this information is in the hands of the authorities.

On September 1st [1919], Monday, while the police were removing the red drapings in the hall, all the Russian delegates, as well as delegates from the other Language Federations — Lithuanian, Lettish [Latvian], Jewish [Yiddish], and Polish — have been told to quietly assemble in a room on the 2nd floor. When I got the word and reached the room I found the meeting just called to order. Some 40 or 45 people had

been seated. This was the formation of the Russian Steam Roller, as the American delegates later referred to it, the Russian caucus. There, in secret session, the leaders of the Russian Federation, straight from the Detroit Convention [5th: Aug. 20-28, 1919], built the machine that dominated and carried the Chicago Convention.

N. Hourwich of New York had the floor, as usual, and explained to the delegates assembled that since the Russians are the real, genuine, and uncompromising Bolsheviks, the Russians must guide, lead, and retain control of the Convention, as well as of the Communist Party to be formed at this Convention, if that party is to be of any Bolshevik use to effectively drown all opposition to our revolutionary propaganda and to speedily bring about the Dictatorship of the Proletariat in this country. Therefore, Comrade Hourwich insisted that we must at this Convention appear “thoroughly disciplined, a solid bloc, a merciless political machine, for the success of the cause.” Further, he has absolute faith that the well disciplined old members of the Party could hold their ground at any time, but since at the Convention there are also present delegates who have not yet had that thorough training and who might be swept and influenced by some able speakers to vote accordingly, Hourwich now, therefore, makes a motion that we all bind ourselves solemnly to abide by the action of our Secretariat and on all questions vote as directed by this Secretariat.

After weak opposition, the Big Guns of the Federation triumphed, with the slight modification that on main issues the Secretariat should be guided by the decision of the delegates arrived at the caucus meets. However, in all emergency cases, when the Secretariat will not have the time to call a caucus meeting, the matter should be decided by themselves and all del-

†- The depiction of the Left Wingers being “bodily thrown out” is factually incorrect. Actually, the SPA Regulars controlled the convention organization process, using Tammany Hall-like methods to win a majority of delegates to the convention and then dominating the Credentials Committee, which slowly heard a long series of challenges which effectively disfranchised a substantial percentage of the Left Wing minority. The Communist Labor Party contingent included: (1) Those from states suspended or expelled in advance of the convention by the National Executive Committee (Massachusetts, Ohio); (2) Those elected to the convention but challenged (California, Minnesota); (3) Individuals not elected as delegates to the SPA Convention who attended the CLP Convention anyway (for example, John Reed); and (4) Those who were elected to the SPA Convention, seated, and who bolted the SPA Convention when it became evident that the Regular faction had won the day. The only “bodily throwing out” which took place happened before the opening gavel fell, when a group of individuals without credentials, headed by John Reed, attempted to seat themselves in the delegate section and were expelled by police at the behest of the SPA leadership. The event, much ballyhooed, seems to have been a provocation by a group of individuals who knew already that the day had been lost, and whose actions generated the desired response.

legates are obliged to vote as instructed.

Thus the formidable bloc had been formed. A very few attempted to protest, but were quickly silenced by threats of expulsion from the Party. I, as a delegate from a Federation branch, naturally was subject to the same discipline, and instructed to attend all meetings of the caucus.

At this first private conference much of what later occurred had been decided upon, although to the new delegates much of what later occurred was not clear. While the American delegates have been waiting for their seats for the opening of the Convention, the Russians have decided upon all the questions of the day. Then in a body we descended from a side door and took our seats on the left side of the hall, as instructed. The arrangement was that the Secretariat will occupy the front table on our side, so that we all could see when their hands go up in voting, when we had to do likewise.

Our Secretariat, who thus practically ruled the Convention, consisted of:

A. Stoklitsky — delegate from Cook Co., Ill, Russian Federation.

N. Hourwich — delegate from New York, Russian Federation.

H. Hiltzik — delegate from New York, Russian Federation.

O. Tyverovsky — delegate from New York, Russian Federation.

J.J. Kravseвич — delegate from New York, Russian Federation.

G. Ashkenuzi — delegate from New York, Russian Federation.

E. Missin — delegate from New York, Russian Federation.

J. Schwartz — delegate from New York, Lettish [Latvian] Branches.

A. Forsinger — Philadelphia, Pa. He later bolted and was substituted for by

J. Kowalski — from the Polish Federation.

Of these the first 7 ruled, the last 2 being only for the purpose of binding the other Federations.

Already at the start the dual-Party factor has played an important part. Or, was it rather, the dual-Convention factor, as neither at the opening of our

Convention, nor even at its termination, has it been known to the rank and file of the delegates that the other Convention is actually launching as an independent organization. This was particularly the case with the Foreign Language delegates. Their leaders succeeded in creating the impression that the Left Wing bolters tried to have a conference, but had to disband and return home. Had the delegates to the Communist Party been informed correctly on the movements and strength of the other Convention, things would probably have shaped themselves differently. Most of the plain delegates have not yet even learned that there are now two Communist Parties in the field.

At the outset also, the 3-faction composition of the Communist Party Convention, the factor most dreaded by them all, and which more than once kept the Convention on the verge of collapse, has been made clear.

Three factions have united to build the Communist Party of America: 1.— the Language Federations, under absolute control of the Russians; 2.— the Fraina group; 3.— the Michigan delegation. The Russians, of the three, the most revolutionary, fanatical, tyrannical, well-financed, experienced, fully organized, and uncompromising, considered themselves, and were admitted, the fundamental builders. Neither the Fraina nor the Michigan group were considered by the Russians reliable Bolsheviks. But, since an American Communist Party could not be built and run without Americans, the group which seemed more liable to submit to the Russian control was destined to be “made party” in the Party.

The problem before the Russian leaders was, first, which of the two groups should be absorbed in order to make the Communist Party have some American names, and secondly, how to keep the other American group guessing whether or not they would be the chosen ones, and thus keep them both in the Convention until its very termination, and avoid a new bolt. The leaders of all the factions have lived through many tense, critical moments in this game. The Russian leaders themselves have on several occasions felt their position critical. However, they craftily managed to keep the upper hand. They concluded by the most brazen, treacherous act; but the group fooled and betrayed, the Michigans, have not proved equal to the Russian game and have been left in the cold.

The whole game has been played behind closed doors, and the public, even a good number of the simple delegates, have been kept in blissful ignorance. But even on the Convention floor danger signs were manifest. The sudden resignation of the Vice Chairman, **J. Ballam**, of the Fraina group on the first day of the Convention, and the resignation in a body of 7 members of the Emergency Committee and 2 secretaries, all of the Fraina group, after a short conference of that group, on the second day of the Convention, brought the situation to a dangerous point. This was the time when the Russians flirted with the Michigans by having their second leader, **A. Renner**, elected Chairman.

The act of wholesale resignation was in protest of the machine-control of the Convention by the few Russian Federation leaders. The Fraina and Michigan groups alike have been ashamed and angered by the revelations that they both were made mere tools in the game. But the principal motive for the clash arose over the question of admitting the Emergency Conference delegates in a body, as the latter insisted.

To the Russians it was a matter of grave danger, as the admittance of a considerable number of "undisciplined American delegates" threatened their machine, for they could then be easily outvoted. On the other hand, both Fraina and the Michigan groups, fearing the Russian machine, hoped to be saved by the admission of more American delegates. Consequently all concerned felt this issue to be of decisive importance and were prepared to fight to the finish.

That night the Russian caucus meeting lasted till far past 3 o'clock next morning. The delegates not experienced in the game and not fully acquainted with the whole issue have been given strict orders to "stick to their guns" and vote according to instructions, while the leaders decided to stand pat, but, for the sake of saving the Convention from breaking up, pretend to yield. This explains the mild statement in the minutes of September 2nd, afternoon session, first clause:

Moved, seconded, and carried that the body RECONSIDER ITS FORMER ACTION relative to sending a committee of 5 to meet with the committee of 5 that bolted from the Socialist Party Convention.

This seeming victory over the Russians, who on the first day of the convention killed this motion and

amended it to the effect that no delegate of that convention could be seated until passed upon by the Credentials Committee in each case, but now were forced to withdraw that amendment — that seeming victory now succeeded in sidetracking the issue, where it was ably handled further by the same Russians to their own satisfaction.

Proud of their "victory," the Americans, now off their guard, were drawn into the game and pacified for the time being.

The next serious clash arose over the manifesto of the new party. The Russians did not bother about that, knowing that they could take either document of both American factions and alter and modify it according to their own taste. We, therefore, had originally two, the Fraina and the Michigan manifestos.

At the caucus meeting the Russian leaders explained although the Fraina group is more kindred to the Bolshevik theory and readily subject to the Bolshevik psychology, the Michigan document is more valuable in point of style, argumentation, and in substance. "Certainly it (the Michigan manifesto) needs a great deal of revising to make a thoroughly Bolshevik document, but it easily can be done," Stoklitsky and Hourwich insisted, and then all members of the Secretariat agreed to take the Michigan manifesto as a basis.

But for reasons known to the few members of the Secretariat, Stoklitsky and Hourwich without warning switched to the other side and, failing even to give any intimation of it to their own caucus members, adopted the Fraina manifesto and ignored the Michigan document. The first we learned of it was when, by midnight on Wednesday, September 3rd, while assembled for our caucus meeting in a smaller hall on the 2nd floor, the leaders of the Michigan group, **D. Batt** and **A. Renner**, with a number of their followers, appeared and demanded to be heard. The Russian leaders got alarmed, but the delegates wanted to know the reason. D. Batt was the spokesman. He demanded to know why the Russians had tricked them by reversing at the last minute their decision to take the Michigan manifesto as a basis. He wished to know why the Russians consider the Michigans Mensheviks, and demanded that the Russian leaders quit their trickery or the Michigan group would know what to do. When they left, the Russian leaders had a hard time to ex-

plain, but failed to enlighten the delegates in the least. Nevertheless, they demanded a vote of confidence to the Secretariat, and the whole matter was referred to them again for adjustment. They easily got the vote of their dummy delegates on the ground of "party discipline." From that evening on the Russian leaders got a free hand and much of the later developments are known to them alone.

The fight for the adoption of the Majority — the Fraina — manifesto, as modified and "purified" by the Russians, took up the last 2 days of the Conference. Before bringing the matter to a climax, the Russians decided to push through the election of the Central Executive Committee of the new Communist Party.

Hastily the Russian caucus was called for that purpose. By this time the other two groups also conducted their closed meetings, where all matters of importance were decided upon. The decision of the bosses of the Russian Federation would be made known to the leaders of the other groups, who had to make the best of it.

The Central Executive Committee of the Party will consist of 15 members. The Translator-Secretaries of the various Language Federations will act as advisory members, having a voice but not a vote. As all Language Federations are under the influence of the Russian Federation, the Russians felt that their interests would be adequately taken care of if they seated another 6 [Russian Federation group] members to the Central Executive Committee proper. Six members were to be allowed to the Fraina group and 3 to the Michigans.

Stoklitsky, however, has feared the influence of the Michigans right along, and on this occasion he resorted to another trick: He failed to inform the Michigan leaders that any seats at all would be given to them on the Executive Committee.

Seeing themselves betrayed in the manifesto deal, the Michigans now concluded that they would be fooled in the elections also. And so when nominations were opened on the floor of the Convention the Michigans all declined the nominations and, moreover, abstained from further participation in the debates and voting on all matters. This unexpected move temporarily confused the Russian Secretariat, and they had to substitute hastily other candidates.

The Michigan delegation was debating in private the advisability of bolting the Convention, but the psychological moment was not grasped and now many delegates were leaving in disgust, but could not be organized in a protesting body. From that hour on Stoklitsky was in constant conference with the Michigan leaders to keep them from bolting and to patch up some compromise. Only one of their members consented to be elected to the Executive Committee at last. So the next morning the Russian delegate *Ashkenuzi* on the floor of the Convention announced his resignation, and *H.M. Wicks*, of Illinois, had been "elected" in his stead.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize one point of importance, and that is the position of the Russian Federation in the Party. The Detroit Conference [of the Russian Federation] was really held for the purpose of organizing solidly the machinery of the Federation with a view of capturing the Chicago Convention and the Communist Party. Hourwich and *Hiltzik* plainly stated that if the Party is not managed by the Russians, it will do America no good. The Party must be controlled and led by the Russian Federation; only for the sake of public opinion and purely propaganda considerations must it have more American names attached to it, but in all high positions we must be careful to put those Americans who will be content to have their names attached, but will not attempt to actually control.

This position the Federations held on to throughout the Convention.

The heart of the Party will be the Russian Federation. It means to continue to dominate. The Russian Federation leaders do not consider the Americans ripe Bolshevik leaders, for they lack, the Russians assert, the true Bolshevik qualities of stern, merciless, uncompromising principles.

This is the general trend of the Convention. I shall now throw light upon particular instances and individuals of interest for our purpose.

Among Federation delegates, most active were: *[Alexander] Stoklitsky*. Undoubtedly well known to you. He keeps in the background at caucus meetings, spoke only 2 or 3 times on purely tactical problems. Appears to be a remarkable tactician. His spokesman and the apparent leader of the Federation

is

N. Hourwich, of New York. He talks on any and all occasions; he formulates all tactical questions; he easily grasps details and detects the slightest deviation of wording; he is constantly on guard against tactical moves of opponents and will suspect and scrutinize each word of a document or proposition. To this matter his mind seems more devoted than to the attacks on government in general or other social matters. Has an unusual capacity for work and likes to do all himself. Not a dangerous leader in revolution, but a great aid to the revolution.

At the Convention, next in importance among the Federation delegates were:

H. Hiltzik, of New York. He seems to possess in a great degree Hourwich's capacity for details, knows the Bolshevik theory and tactics well, and, like Hourwich, will persist and impose his opinion on gatherings with complete disregard for rules and forms. With Stoklitsky unseen, self-possessed and cunningly ruling the Convention, Hourwich and Hiltzik made this ruling possible and easy. They were the noisy practical managers, and they work in team. They carried all for the boss.

John Schwartz, from Boston. Lettish [Latvian]. He is very much less capable than Hourwich or Hiltzik; is not shrewd and cares little for detail or form. He is a resolute rough leader of the mob. In time of open riot he is the more formidable. He cares little for consistency or logic; he storms and commands, himself leading and confident of being followed. He'll swear and threaten, and throw all argumentation to the winds. The mob feels safer with him than with the wise leaders. The shrewd leaders of the Federation are careful to have him in their midst to insure against his opposition.

E. Missin, of New York. He is watchful, growing influential, is courted by the leaders.

The last two named, Schwartz and Missin, have been for some time suspected by me on good ground of either being directly connected with, or at any rate, giving substantial aid to the Knights of the Red Star. I have carefully observed them and hope to get the evidence in time.

Of the Fraina group, the leaders were in order of

importance;

I.E. Ferguson, of Cook Co., Ill.

J.J. Ballam, of Massachusetts.

C.E. Ruthenberg, of Ohio.

J. Lovestone, of New York.

L.C. Fraina, of New York.

Of the Michigan delegation the influential delegates were:

Batt.

Renner.

Wicks.

Of matters and questions taken up at the Convention, besides those already described in this report, nothing of more serious or important nature was brought up, the matter of formation of an American Communist Party having been considered of sufficient importance. This matter, however, was treated at our secret sittings with utter frankness. As brought out by Hiltzik, Schwartz, [*Meyer*] **Lunin** of New York, and **S. Miller** of New York, this party must be made an exact copy of the Russian original. These comrades do not believe that any modifications should be made in this country. Even the manner of attaining the goal will practically be repeated. Only in the method of educating the workingmen of America for the revolution do they admit slight variation according to circumstances.

The aims and purposes of the Communist Party shall be:

1.— To agitate among the working class of America for creating unrest and rebellion.

2.— To teach and popularize in America the aims and ideals of Bolshevism.

3.— To train the American workingmen in the tactics of the Bolsheviks for the overthrow of the government and the seizure of the state by the Communist Party.

Since a considerable number of the delegates represent constituencies entirely opposed to political action, believing that the desired results could be best attained by direction alone, much time has been consumed by the Russian leaders at our secret meetings in impressing upon the delegates that we shall resort to political action in the form of parliamentary politics

solely and exclusively for the purpose of DESTRUCTION, not construction. Delegate Miller of New York insisted on clearly saying so in the manifesto. The Party, then, will use the occasion of elections only for the purpose of openly holding meetings and discussing the issues on hand with a view of discrediting the government, local and federal; treating the matter at issue from a purely Bolshevik standpoint. Thus constantly agitating for discontent, disorder, and rebellion, the Communist Party will at the psychological moment seize the machinery of the government, mercilessly crush all opposition, institute the reign of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, and the Bolsheviks in America will triumph.

In order to convey all this meaning with the least possible necessity of saying so, the manifesto of the party was fought for.

The Communist Party of America is built entirely in accordance with the principles and rules of the Third International, as laid down by the Communist International Conference at Moscow, March 2-6, 1919, and signed by Zinoviev, Lenin, Trotsky, and others.

The Constitution of the Communist Party is now being printed; the first approved proof in its final form I turned over to Mr. [Jacob] Spolansky for your information.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.

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