
Executive Committee Rule.

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It is probable that most readers of the Review have heard something of the "Finnish Controversy," but like many others, you have passed it by as simply a factional fight similar to those which have embroiled different groups of the Socialist Party in the past. This controversy, which began as a struggle between individuals and groups of individuals for control, has divided the Finnish Federation into radicals and conser-

be well to review briefly the more important events which led up to the recent decision of the National Executive Committee. The Finnish Federation, organized in 1904, had grown to a membership of about 15,000 by the beginning of 1914, although at the present time there are probably less than 10,000 members. For purposes of propoganda the organization is divided into three districts, each under the control of a

District Executive Committee, and each had a daily paper owned by a stock company. The papers representing the Eastern and the Middle Districts had many tilts over questions of tactics, each representing very largely the sentiment of its district, the Easter being the more conservative and



vatives, developed Committee rule in the Federation, and, with the entrance of the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party into the controversy, has brought the Party organization to the parting of the ways. The problems which have arisen out of this conflict must be faced by the entire membership, and they are so serious as to require careful consideration.

History of the Controversy.

Before the present situation is considered it may

the Middle District more radical. Until 1913 these differences were almost entirely fought out in the field of academic discussion.

In that year, however, a determined effort was made to extend the influence of those dominant in the Eastern into the Middle District. This latter district had a larger membership than either of the others and its paper was the most influential, having a larger circulation than any Finnish paper in America. The contest began in Local Negaunee, Michigan, where Frank Aaltonen and William Risto had each attempted

to control the Local and Risto finally secured a majority of the 200 members. It was then that Aaltonen called upon the State Executive Board to expel this Local, which demand was obeyed on March 16, 1913, on the ground that the Local Secretary had failed to send in eight ballots on a state referendum, the secretary's excuse being that the ballots reached him too late. A new Local of Aaltonen's friends was given a charter at once, and four days later Aaltonen and four others appeared before the Circuit Court of Marquette County and asked for an injunction against the members of the old Local on the ground given above as a reason for expulsion and on the further ground

"that the said defendants are believers in, and advocates of, sabotage. This implies that the said defendants advocated and taught among other things, the destruction of property and the disregard of personal and property rights and personal violence, and that said defendants believed and taught that employees should take and use unlawfully measures extending from sulking and neglecting their work to the destruction of property owned by their employers, and among other things, the said defendants believed in and advocated the nonpayment of bills owing by them and others and generally advocated and believed in the overthrow of existing systems and governments by revolution and violence; that such beliefs and teachings were contrary to the principles of the Socialist Party and were contrary to the law of the land."

He asked that the hall, \$2,000 worth of personal property, and \$7,000 worth of stock be turned over to the new Local; also that the members of the old Local be forbidden from holding any meetings in their hall, from even entering the hall, and from inspecting the books of the Local. If the old Local was to be broken up its property must be secured, but this resort to the capitalist courts aroused a storm of protest from Finnish Locals all over the country, and the National Executive Committee of the Federation and the Middle District Executive Committee each sent committees to Negaunee to investigate. The report of the investigators caused the action of Aaltonen (known among the Finnish comrades as "Injunction Frank") and his friends to be condemned and the new Local was refused admission to the Federation. This action was also condemned by *Tyomies*, the paper of the Middle District.

Later, these men, who had maligned their comrades in injunction proceedings, entered into an agreement whereby all those who were members of the Local at the time it was expelled should be permitted to become members of the new Local. Such an agreement being an admission that there was either no truth in the injunction charges or that they were willing to condone violation of party tactics to secure a few thousand dollars' worth of property. The fact that *Tyomies* had opposed these high-handed methods caused Aaltonen to look about for means to control the paper. Later a vacancy occurred and S. Alanne, a member of the State Committee of Michigan, was chosen editor and the paper then admitted that an injunction was all right under certain circumstances when the rank and file became unruly.

William Risto, one of the active members of the majority faction of Local Negaunee, was sent to the Eastern District as a representative of the Working People's College, and the Executive Committee of that district decreed that the locals should not permit him to speak in their halls. They expelled six Locals for disobeying this order. These Locals appealed to the National Executive Committee of the Federation, which reversed the action of the District Committee, but the Locals were not reinstated.

More Committee Rule.

The newspapers and District Committees conducted an active campaign for the control of the National Executive Committee of the Federation for 1914, this being especially true of the Eastern organ. The new Committee admitted the new Negaunee Local and upheld the expulsion of the eastern Locals. The conservative element had also secured control of all three papers and the Eastern and Western District Committees, while the radicals remained in control of the Middle District Committee and the Workers' College. The conservatives now centered their efforts to secure control of the Middle District.

This district held its convention at Duluth, Minn., February 21-29, 1914, and among other things refused to seat the new Negaunee Local, instructed changes in the editorial policy of *Tyomies* to conform to the sentiment of the majority of the Middle District, and proposed an investigation of the business

management of the paper. Refusal to comply with the decisions of this convention caused a demand to be made by the majority faction in that district for a meeting of the stockholders of the Tyomies Publishing Company. Moses Hahl, spokesman for the conservatives, says that they feared that the radicals might have a majority of the stock, so the conservatives made a deal with Raivaaja Publishing Company, a concern which has no property except the subscription list of the paper which it publishes, the plant being owned by another company, by which \$20,000 worth of stock in Tyomies Publishing Company should be transferred to Raivaaja in exchange for a note for that amount due in five years. The radicals withdrew when they found the conservatives in control. Later a stock company was formed in Duluth, Minn., by representatives of radical Locals for the purpose of publishing a Finnish Socialist daily. They began the publication of *The Socialist* about June 10, [1914], and at the June meeting of the National Executive Committee of the Federation a decree was issued informing the members that any member or Local supporting *The Socialist* would be expelled. Later this Committee expelled twenty Locals and members in about twenty others, because they had supported the paper.

After the expulsions, these Locals and others in sympathy with them began to pay dues direct to the State organizations, and the Finnish Federation requested the various State Executive Boards to support the Federation, not on any ground of right but only of fraternal spirit. In fact Comrade Hahl, who prepared a statement for the Federation, says, "Formally the Finnish organization has no right to revoke charters of any Locals affiliated with it. This right is vested solely with the respective state organizations."

Comrade Lanfersiek, Executive Secretary, was asked for a ruling and he replied that members and Locals could not be expelled for supporting a Socialist paper. The expelled Locals appealed to the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party and this question was taken up at the September [1914] meeting and it was decided that "we offer it as the opinion of this Committee that the expelled Locals still remain Locals of the Socialist Party until such time as the expulsion is concurred in by the state organization." At this meeting Comrades Berger, Germer, and Mauer were elected to attend the Finnish convention.

Last November [1914] the conservative faction held a convention in Chicago, the principle decisions being to reaffirm the expulsion of Locals and members, the boycott of the Workers' College, and to incorporate the Executive Committee of the Federation so that it might have the legal ownership of all the property of the various Locals belonging to the Federation. They called upon the American Socialist Party to refuse to permit members and Locals to join the state organizations direct. Here would be another opportunity to use the courts to get possession of the property of all the Locals which might disagree with the Committee.

When the representatives of these factions appeared before the members of the National Executive Committee the latter were not to be found, but in their places were Comrades Lanfersiek and Ameringer. During the past year the National Executive Committee has spent \$1,700 holding meetings, at which they have accomplished practically nothing, and when a question affecting the rights of some 5,000 members of the Socialist Party comes before them, they shift the responsibility upon others and are too busy to attend. It is declared by some of those present at the convention that the chairman announced that it had been already decided by those in charge of the American Socialist movement that the radical members would be expelled from the party, and the conservative Finnish papers stated that Comrade Ameringer had declared the radical faction to be anarchists. A comrade has remarked that "such claims of partiality and collusion made by those papers and officials tend to minimize the esteem for the investigators and the fairness of this trial in the eyes of the membership."

Sub-Committee Report.

The findings of those who took the place of the members of the National Executive Committee on the Investigating Committee are a rehash of the statements made by the conservative faction, containing the arguments and excuses offered by that faction. Some of the excuses offered by Comrades Ameringer and Lanfersiek are illuminating; for instance, the excuse for the stock juggling on Tyomies Publishing Company, that it was one of the "numerous measures taken by both sides to secure control." Other excuses are

“their language is altogether different from any other European language.” “This is not a pink tea affair, therefore the Finnish Federation should be upheld.” This Committee concludes that the Federation “has not violated the constitution or platform; it has done no injustice, and *nothing could be done in this case if it had.*” It is to be hoped that the members of the Socialist Party will let this statement soak in.

At the meeting of the National Executive Committee, on December 13, [1914], resolutions were adopted upholding the acts of the Executive Committee of the Federation, the findings of its subcommittee, and then, forgetting that the Socialist Party had a Constitution, declared “that the decision of the Finnish Federation as to expulsion of locals or members *shall* be accepted by state, county, and local organizations as final.”

On December 15, [1914], the State Executive Committee of Michigan expelled two Locals and members from others under the decision stated above, although the official notice of this decision was not sent out for at least a week later. The State Secretary of Michigan in the December Bulletin states that these expulsions took place upon the order of National Committeeman Aaltonen as that would eliminate candidates opposed to him.

This in brief is a statement of the more important events which are either admitted by both parties to the controversy or are proven by documents. Care has been taken to eliminate references to occurrences over which there are conflicting reports and there are no other means of getting the facts. The important fact which stands out above all others is that **members and Locals have been expelled for supporting a Socialist paper, and the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party has ordered the state organizations to accept this action as binding on them.**

It is stated in the decision that it was given only after “the most careful and painstaking investigation,” yet Comrade Duncan, in a letter to the Executive Secretary dated September 16, 1914, states that “it is my opinion that national, state, and local organizations should be guided by the recommendation of the Finnish organization and that no Finnish Local be recognized that is not in good standing with the Federation.” This letter was written some three months be-

fore the “careful and painstaking investigation” above referred to.

Many Socialist Parties.

This decision has the effect of making each Language Federation and independent organization responsible only to the NEC. In states having Locals belonging to each of the Federations, there will be 11 Socialist Parties, each working under its own constitution, but only the English-speaking members will be subject to the will of the state membership, while they in turn will have no authority that the foreign-speaking locals will need to respect. The result of such a condition will be chaos. By this decision the NEC has taken to itself the power to determine who shall and who shall not remain members of the Socialist Party.

If this decision stands, a precedent has been established of giving power to national officers to place any Socialist paper under the ban, even to the extent of expelling those who should give such papers their support. It may be urged that this could not happen, yet not many months ago an attempt was made to prevent certain Socialist papers from advertising in the party paper since those papers were not in harmony with the NEC.

It appears that the National Executive Committee has not only ordered the expulsion of some 5,000 party members, but has done what it could to obstruct the work of the Woman’s National Committee, as is shown by the following extracts from a communication from the Woman’s National Committee:

“while the present National Executive Committee has blocked every effort of the Woman’s Committee, it has made no woman’s propaganda on its own account.”
 *** “Virtually every motion which we have submitted providing for activity in the ranks of the women has been rejected by the National Executive Committee.”
 *** “We have made our protest to the NEC. They have replied by adopting a motion which might well have proceeded from a standard bourgeois body addressing its natural inferiors.”

The answer referred to by the Woman’s Committee was an expression of regret at their inability to do anything and an assurance that no discourtesy was intended.

The NEC has already admitted that it made a mistake when it cause the locals to be circularized on behalf of *The Leader*. Is it not about time that it admits the other mistakes it has made in blocking propaganda work and expelling members, so that it can at least say that it did not stand as a stumbling block to the progress of the movement, even though it cannot point to much constructive work?

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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