
Italian Socialist Convention: [West Hoboken, NJ — Sept. 6-7, 1903]

by Silvio Origo

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The first annual convention of the “Federazione Socialista Italiana” took place on September 6-7 [1903], in West Hoboken, NJ. There were 33 delegates present, representing some 30 locals and 8 different states.

The convention was opened amid great enthusiasm by G.M. Serrati, editor of *Il Proletario* — the Italian Socialist daily — who called the delegates to order and made some appropriate introductory remarks. It was voted by acclamation to send a congratulatory cablegram to Comrade Enrico Ferri in Rome, for his noble fight against the “grafters” in the Navy department. This also meant that the convention was with him, and stood for an uncompromising political attitude.

Aside from the minor work of the Federation’s affairs, the most important questions for the convention to discuss were the following:

1st — The Party Press.

2nd — The Cooperative Stores Movement.

3rd — Establishment of an Immigration Bureau.

4th — Attitude of the Federation towards the trade unions.

5th — Attitude of the Federation towards the two Socialist parties, the SLP and the SP.

Only 1 out of the 33 delegates was in favor of discontinuing the publication of the daily paper. Thirty-two delegates wanted the paper to be continued at all costs, even to the extent of having each local pledge a monthly contribution to defray the expenses of publication. A true spirit of Socialism and of noble self-denial was shown by the delegates during this discussion, in which the comrades stated their willingness to share their scanty wages for the enlightenment of their fellowmen.

An able report was submitted by G. Lavagnini of Northfield, Vt., on the establishment of cooperative stores, demonstrating their efficiency as an auxiliary of the Socialist movement, and showing their successful operation amongst the Italian Socialists of Vermont.

It was the sense of the convention that the comrades should encourage and work for such movements in all places where local conditions were favorable, especially in small cities, where large department stores did not exist.

The advisability of establishing an Immigration Bureau was then discussed, and the advantages that might accrue to the immigrant were plainly stated. The *padrone*, the banker, and many other colonial sharks, made an easy prey of the poor and simple Italians migrating to these shores, defrauding them and selling them like chattels to the contractors. The Bureau would protect them, assist them, and put them on their guard. It was voted that it should be left to the Executive Committee to take the preliminary steps for the establishment of such a bureau.

It being impossible to discuss the trade unions without involving party tactics, a discussion on the same was then started.

As might be supposed, this brought about a warm debate, and it seemed for a time that the SLP comrades were going to sway the convention. A report was submitted by Dellavia, full of the false and timeworn vilifications against the Socialist Party, and, in order to prejudice the delegates against our party, the same report had been printed and distributed some time before the convention. Comrade G.M. Serrati, however, replied to the false accusation, and showed

that while it might be true that in some instances the Socialist Party had been slack and of a too broad spirit, the majority of its members were good uncompromising Socialists, doing excellent work in all states of the union, in many of which the SLP did not exist at all. "In the SLP press," he said, "I see nothing but insults against other Socialists; in the SP press I see nothing but Socialism. I am in favor of a union between the two parties, but cannot countenance the conduct of the SLP." He then read a communication of the International Socialist Bureau, informing him that the only Socialist Party recognized there at present was the Socialist Party.

Comrades Ecaterinara of Newark, NJ, and G. Lavagnini of Vermont also spoke in favor of the SP, stating that it was the only party working for Socialism in their respective localities.

A number of resolutions were introduced, and one of Com. Serrati, to the effect that

While the Federation was on general principles with the SLP, it was optional for comrades in places where there was no SLP to vote for the uncompromising candidates of the other Socialist Party.

An official delegate from the SLP was then given the floor to make his *pronunciamento* on the resolution. He said he was not in favor of it. If the Italian Socialists favored the SLP, they must either be entirely with the SLP or against it. His Party would not stand for a halfway policy. He hoped the Italian comrades would open their eyes.

The answer of the convention to this complimentary remark was another resolution:

To sever all connections and alliances with the SLP, and constitute themselves into an independent organization.

which was then put to a vote and carried, 19 for, and 15 against.

The Trade Union question then naturally resolved itself, and the convention voted to follow the tactics as laid down at the International Congress, which are those of the Socialist Party.

Several minor matters were then transacted: the election of a new Executive Committee, and the appointment of Local Newark to receive all complaints. The issuing of \$2 shares, to cover a mortgage on the Socialist Block of Barre, Vt., was authorized. The resignation of G.M. Serrati as editor of *Il Proletario* was unwillingly received. The convention adjourned at 8:45 pm with three cheers for International Socialism.

While the constitution of the Federation did not allow the delegates of the Socialist Party to be officially recognized, Comrades Solomon, DeLuca, and the writer were present and made many friends amongst the delegates, eventually furnishing them with useful information which had a decided bearing on their most important vote.

On the whole, the convention was a credit to the Italian comrades. Party and personal feelings were all made subordinate to the Socialist movement. A sincere and intense desire to promote the cause of Socialism dominated all their actions, and when the vote to break away from DeLeon was announced, a voice was heard to say: "There are neither victors nor vanquished here, we are all comrades!"

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