
Why a National Socialist Convention?

An Editorial from the *New Yorker Volkszeitung*

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The *New York Volkszeitung*, the German daily organ of the New York Socialist Party, publishes a two-column editorial captioned “Why a National Convention?” in which it takes a decided stand against the so-called Cincinnati referendum proposition, the object of which is to do away with the Socialist Party National Convention in 1916. “In our opinion the adoption of the Cincinnati amendment to the National Constitution would be disastrous for the Socialist movement of this country,” the editorial says:

“The adoption of the proposition to do away with the 1916 National Convention would not only resemble very much a declaration of bankruptcy of the party, but it would in reality prevent our party movement to determine its attitude towards the exceedingly important and vital problems which the European war has created for the International Proletariat.

“We do by no means overlook the fact that the existing party deficit and the heavy expense caused by a convention are an important reason for the proposed elimination of the national party convention. But where the highest interests of the party are at stake, financial obstacles must be overcome. And we are convinced that there are ways and means to overcome these obstacles and we shall speak of them later on. That 1916 is a presidential year does not so absolutely speak in favor of a convention, especially since our presidential candidates are to be nomi-

nated by referendum; the platform could be prepared by a good committee, if the old platform could no longer be used. Even the selection of a campaign committee would not speak so very weightily in favor of the convention.

“What makes the next year’s convention so inevitably necessary is the situation caused by the world war which brings the Socialist movement face to face with national and international problems. Only a national convention composed of the best minds of our movement can determine the attitude of our Socialist Party toward the armament problem in America; only such a convention will have the required authority to unify the many prevailing opinions and to find ways and means whereby an effectual action on the part of the American working class against these efforts of militarism can be brought about. Even in view of the prospects that the next session of Congress will accept the Wilson-Daniel armament program, it is equally certain that the next presidential campaign will be conducted under the banner of “Preparedness,” and that the real fight for and against American militarism will not begin until in the fall campaign of 1916. For that fight we must be thoroughly prepared, not by means of a loosely-drafted platform, which, in its general construction is untrue and ridiculous in effect; but by means of a clear, sound program, carefully considered and constructed, which must be made for the banner under which all class-conscious proletarians can gather for the political class struggle.

“In addition to this national question there will be an international problem which can be solved neither by a referendum vote nor by a committee of five. The war must end sometime. But when it does end the necessity of international organization will become more urgent for the world proletariat than ever before, and the calling of international congresses will be one of the first duties of the new reconstruction period. Shall, then, our National Executive [Committee] determine the attitude of the Socialist Party of the United States? Or shall the duly-elected, ablest minds of the movement, in convention assembled, determine how we desire or wish the reorganization of the International? Referendums can never have the same effect and good

results in matters of this kind as personal deliberations in conventions.

“The Socialist Party has not held a national convention since 1912; if the 1916 convention is to be eliminated, there would probably be no national convention until 1920, and the discussion of most vital questions of principle and tactics would be confined to small party circles. But in the interest of the intellectual life of the Socialist Party of America this must not and should not happen.

“It seems to us that Local New York discovered a middle way which would get us over the financial dilemma. Local New York wants the number of national convention delegates reduced from 300 to 200 and furthermore proposes that the delegate expenses be paid by the locals. The locals could cooperate among themselves in the selection of and payment for the delegates. In many instances money could be raised by means of entertainments, and in addition the National Office shall issue an assessment not exceeding 25 cents. *The national convention should take place and the Cincinnati motion should be voted down!*”

Edited by Tim Davenport

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