
Shall Party Committees Control Referendums?

Letter to the Editor of *The American Socialist*,

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by A.W. Ricker

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Every member of the Socialist Party should know of the methods that are being used to control the referendum for the election of National Secretary and members of the Executive Committee. I enclose you herewith a copy of a letter sent out by the National Committee of the German Language Federation under date of January 13, 1916, and request that it be published in *The Socialist* at the earliest possible date.

In this letter the German National Committee tells their membership to vote for Adolph Germer for National Secretary, and not to vote for [Carl] Thompson. They also tell their members to vote for Herman Schlueter and Santeri Nuorteva for members of the National Executive Committee. Schlueter is editor of the New York *Volkszeitung*, a German Socialist paper, and Nuorteva is editor of one of the Finnish Socialist papers. Obviously the adding of Nuorteva's name to the slate was for the purpose of encouraging the Finnish comrades to give it their support.

This is the first time in the history of the party so far as we know that a National Committee has thus officially interfered with a referendum and recommended the election of their own chosen candidates.

The possibilities of this sort of action are apparent if we remember that the foreign federations constitute about 30 percent of the entire membership and always cast a much larger percentage of their vote than the English speaking branches. In many cases the German branches have the unit rule and vote of their entire membership in one way.

If, now, this vote can be lined up solidly for certain candidates or policies it may easily mean the factional control of the party by the federations.

The letter of the German National Committee delivered the votes. Out of 196 German votes in Chicago, Germer received 194. In New York City the federation vote was almost solidly for Germer as per instructions of the committee. In the state of Massachusetts where the membership is overwhelmingly Finnish, Germer had 1,088 votes and Thompson only 284.

Had the plans of the German committee worked out we would have had not only a National Secretary who was the candidate of the German Federation, but we also would have had a National Executive Committee NOT A SINGLE ONE OF WHOM WAS BORN IN THIS COUNTRY and one of whom — Comrade Nuorteva — is not even a citizen of the United States.

Taken together this affair constitutes a dangerous precedent which if followed may make the party endless trouble. Above all our referendums should be free and untrammelled. Let us have full and free discussions of every man and measure that is up for referendum vote. But let us not have any elections fixed beforehand by party officials and votes delivered in mass at the command of party committees.

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