
Party Officials to Confer on New Program: Socialist Referendum on Current Issues Would Be Dangerous Now, Says Committee

Unsigned report in the *New York Call*, v. 11, no. 112 (May 11, 1918), pg. 1.

CHICAGO, May 10 [1918].— In a session held here today the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party decided to issue the following message to the members of the party:

Comrades:—

A national referendum has been proposed by the 9th Ward Branch of Cook County, Illinois, on the party's attitude toward war and peace. We are informed that other motions on the same subject and from different points of view are about to be offered for referendum. Our attorneys, who within the last few months have defended numerous cases of Socialist Party members charged with violations of the Espionage Act, inform us that this law, especially with the pending amendments, makes it impossible to have a free and frank discussion of the problems involved in the proposed referendum.

To submit any resolutions on the subject of the war and the Socialists' attitude toward it at this time would mean that only one side of the question could be heard in discussion in our press and at party meetings. This procedure would violate the most fundamental principles of democracy. There is also the danger that thousands of comrades may be led to express opinions which might subject them to criminal prosecution under the drastic provisions of the Espionage Law and the arbitrary application of that law to Socialists.

The National Executive Committee recognizes that the right of free discussion on the subject of war has been abrogated in the United States, and that it has neither the legal nor the moral right to invite the party members into a discussion of that subject. Under the circumstances the National Executive Committee

requests the party locals not to attempt to initiate any referendums on the subject of war, as the committee cannot submit such motions to the membership.

The National Executive Committee realizes that the recent developments in connection with the war have created new situations toward which the party must take a stand, and also that the time is ripe for a positive and constructive program of action.

The new party constitution provides for an annual joint conference of the State Secretaries, the National Executive Committee, and other national party officials, and your committee has called such a conference for the 10th day of August [1918]. That meeting will be representative of the whole movement in the whole country, and will be able to cope with the great problems in a calm and deliberative manner and with a view to serving the best interests of the Socialist movement of the United States and of International Socialism. It will be able to formulate the sentiments and state the position of the Socialists of America not only in the light of the most recent developments here and abroad, but also with a view to furnishing a concrete and uniform Socialist program for the ensuing congressional election.

The National Executive Committee begs the comrades to believe that in taking this stand they are actuated solely by the desire to preserve within the party, in the face of this worldwide crisis, that harmony of spirit and unity of action which are so essential to the victory of our great cause. And for the sake of our great cause we urge the comrades everywhere to maintain an attitude of mutual tolerance, forbearance, and cooperation, regardless of any and all honest differences of opinion which may exist among them. So long as the party members remain true to the fundamental ideals of Socialism, and our party

remains united in its determination to fight for the political and economic emancipation of the workers of all countries, we are bound to come out right in the long run and to become a still greater force for good during the war and after the war.

Comrades, a vital, perhaps even a deciding, struggle is awaiting us in the congressional election next fall. In that election our party will have an unprecedented opportunity to establish Socialism as a dominant factor in American political life. Let us subordinate everything else to the immediate task of organizing the great victory of 1918. Let us carry the message of Socialism to the people of this country from now until election day. Let us bend all our energies and concentrate all our efforts upon the work of organization and education.

With unwavering confidence in the triumph of our cause and in the loyalty and devotion of the rank and file of the party membership, we submit this message to you with fraternal greetings.

National Executive Committee, Socialist Party.

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