

---

# Introductory Remarks to the 1919 Emergency National Convention of the Socialist Party of America: Chicago, IL — August 30, 1919.

by Adolph Germer

From the uncorrected *Proceedings of the National Convention of the Socialist Party at Machinists' Hall, 113 S. Ashland Blvd., Chicago, IL. State Historical Society of Wisconsin, micro 2094, reel 1, pp. 1-8.*

*The convention was called to order by Comrade Adolph Germer, National Executive Secretary, at 11 o'clock am.*

Comrades and friends:

Under the national constitution of the party, it becomes my duty to call to order the National Convention. I am sure that you will agree with me when I say that this will, doubtless, be the most epoch-making convention in the history of American socialism — largely due to the world developments during the last 5 years. On account of the world happenings during that time, tremendous changes in thought have taken place; not only changes in thought, but social revolutions have occurred in various countries of the world. These facts have had their reflex in other countries, including the United States; and, as a result of these conditions, there has also been augmented in the party the factional conflicts that have existed and have manifested themselves from time to time, until it has reached a condition where it was necessary to call together the representatives of the Socialist Party in a national convention and there exchange our ideas and our thoughts, formulate a policy and program to unite the working classes of this country, that we might follow the splendid example set by our comrades in Rus-

sia. (*Applause.*)

When I say that, I want it clearly understood that we do not adopt in toto the methods of our European comrades. We readily distinguish between the conditions prevailing in Russia at the time of the revolution and the conditions that prevail in this country now. We recognize that there is a marked distinction,



a decided difference, both in political and economic conditions, and, in consequence, our methods will have to be somewhat different in accomplishing our goal. (*Applause.*)

It is upon this that there has been a division in the party, but there are other reasons for the division, for the factional controversy. I am not discouraged because of any factional controversy in the party. I always believed that this factional division leads to healthy methods, provided it is not carried to the extent where the organization is torn into parts and shreds, and leaves us an easy prey to our common enemy. (*Applause.*) And, in this controversy, methods have been resorted to that are unheard of in any socialistic movement in the world. Schemes have been conceived under high-sounding phrases of capturing the party for

revolutionary Socialism, implying thereby that the Socialist Party is not a revolutionary party. (*Applause.*) I think that it requires no extended argument to convince every open-minded comrade here that the Socialist Party of the United States, during the most critical and trying period of the world's history, stood as true to its revolutionary principles as any Socialist party on earth. (*Applause.*)

In testimony of our loyalty to international revolutionary Socialism, we find that hundreds — yea, thousands — of our members are in the prisons today, and hundreds more on the way to prison. Were we the Scheidemanns and the Eberts that some would characterize us with being, I am satisfied that Comrade Eugene V. Debs would not be in prison today, and that even Comrade [Victor] Berger, who seems to be a thorn in the flesh of the self-styled loyalists, would not be under a 20 year sentence, and 4 more indictments pending against him. (*Applause.*) Nor would the Congress of the United States today seek to keep him from a seat in the national legislative hall of the United States when he was elected by an overwhelming plurality. (*Loud applause.*) To me, at least, it is evidence that our activity has been loyal to the working class, the charges to the contrary notwithstanding.

But, comrades, this activity in the Socialist Party has not confined itself in these activities to the so-called capture of the party for revolutionary Socialism; has not confined itself to a discussion of principles, of methods or of tactics, [but has consisted] of personal slanders and conspiracies against individuals that have been engaged in for no other reason than to break down the confidence of the membership [and those] in whose hands the affairs of the Socialist Party were, by the members, entrusted. They know that when the confidence of the membership is broken, that insurgency can easily triumph. But, I am glad to say, comrades, that those who have been in the party for years, tried and true, upon whose shoulders the burden of the activities in the past have rested, are true to the Socialist Party today, and are issuing decided rebukes against insurgency and disruption. (*Applause.*) I say that [the insurgents are] not satisfied with [lodging]

charges against a so-called and allegedly “reactionary” party, but [they carry themselves] in the dark, like midnight thieves, sneaking from [here to there], whispering inaudibly, hoping thereby that the comrades may think that there is something wrong with those who have been selected by the members to manage the affairs of the party.

I know, comrades, that the truth is not pleasant; and I know when the fingers are put upon the guilty, they always set up a shriek. (*Applause.*) [They offer] no specific statements, but general gossip, rumor, suggestion, innuendo; the kind of work that the Harry Orchards carry on in the economical labor movement.† I want to say that when the ballots have been counted, and when the facts are recorded, we will have no apologies to make; we are willing to rest upon the facts, and not upon innuendo, not upon rumor, not upon suggestions.

So far as I am concerned, comrades, I want to say this and say it emphatically: that, if there is any lingering doubt in the mind of anyone as to my conduct in the Socialist Party, I want the most extensive and fullest investigation made, that the facts might become known. (*Cries of “Good,” and applause.*) If there is anything against any member of the National Executive Committee — the majority of the Executive Committee, I correct — against whom there is any lingering doubt as to their activities in the Socialist Party, I am satisfied and I can speak for them and voice their sentiments, that they want the fullest investigation made and the facts reported. (*Applause.*) And that is what we are here for. The membership wants to know the truth, and, so far as this convention is concerned, the membership is going to have it. (*Applause.*)

Comrades, it is not my purpose to go into a detailed history of our movement [since] the last national convention. Most of you are fully familiar with it. It will come out in the course of the discussion. Under the national constitution, those delegates whose credentials have been reported, and against whom there is no contest, shall organize the convention permanently, and pass upon those whose seats have been contested.

†- Harry Orchard (née Albert Horsley) was a professional labor spy and agent provocateur coached into giving false testimony against 3 top leaders of the Western Federation of Miners in an effort to implicate them in the 1905 assassination of former Idaho Governor Frank Steunenberg.

In order to satisfy the minds of those who are not familiar with the provision of the constitution in respect to the National Convention, I read Section 6, Article 9, paragraph c:

At the time and place set for the opening of the National Convention, the Executive Secretary shall call the convention to order, and shall call the roll to ascertain the number of uncontested delegates, and they shall permanently organize the convention.

Comrades, before reading the names of the uncontested delegates, I want to read the official call that brought you here this morning.

\* \* \*

There is just one other matter on which I think I ought to touch, and that is the occurrence here the early part of this morning. Under the contract for this hall, the Socialist Party was given the exclusive use thereof, during the period of the rental of this hall, and the adjoining anterooms. It was reported to the office that a number of persons, contested delegates and non-delegates, were filling the hall. I immediately came over here and found the report to be true. I asked them to vacate the hall until the convention was duly

organized [so] that the matters before it may take their orderly course. A storm of protest immediately went up. After repeated requests, and finding a police officer here, several of the comrades who were in the hall said, "Ask the police officer to clear the hall until the convention is organized, and then admit those who are entitled to admission." It was upon that request, the urgent request of a number of delegates, that the police officials were finally appealed to. Now, I regret as much as any of you, and I know all of you regret, that a condition of that kind was created; and I say, comrades, the remarks that were made, the comments that were passed as they left the hall, indicated that they were playing for such a condition to make propaganda against the Socialist Party. (*Loud applause.*) One of them, a leading spirit of the Opposition, said, "This is just what we wanted. It will make us 10,000 members."

Now, if those are the methods by which they expect to get members, I say that such members are not an asset to the revolutionary Socialist movement. (*Applause.*)

\* \* \*

*Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.*

*Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2007. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.*