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# Minutes of the Left Wing Caucus of the 1919 Convention of the Socialist Party of America

[August 29 - 31, 1919]

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## INTRODUCTION

The battle within the Socialist Party has been made and won. As was predicted at the National Left Wing Conference and again at the State Convention of the Socialist Party of Ohio, the reactionary Socialists did seek and get the aid of the police in preventing the party's membership, through regularly elected delegates, from control of the convention.

Yet, the battle within the Socialist Party for Left Wing principles has been won, the Left Wing element in the party is now the Communist Labor Party, and all that remains of the old reactionary coterie is but a skeleton, amply signifying its demise.

Adolph Germer reported to his packed convention that the membership of 109,000 of January 1st had dwindled to 39,000. This 39,000 has now been about completely wiped out by the formation of the Communist Labor Party by 82 delegates from 22 states. The minutes, the official acts of the Communist Labor Party convention appear below.

The existence of two Communist Parties after the Chicago conventions was an event which very few Left Wing Socialists expected. The difference between the Communist Labor Party and the Communist Party is not one of principle, but rather one of organization control. The Communist Party was called into existence by the Russian Socialist Federations, whereas the Communist Labor Party was the logical outgrowth of the fight within the Socialist Party for Left Wing control. The Communist Labor Party made many sincere efforts to unite with the Communist Party, while both were in conven-

tion, upon a basis of equality. These offers for unity were denied by the Communist Party for reasons not yet altogether clear. The convention of the Communist Labor Party, just before closing its deliberations, passed a motion extending a standing invitation for Unity to the Communist Party, and instructing the national officials of the Communist Labor Party to accept every invitation for unity upon a basis of equality from the Communist Party or any other revolutionary working class organization.

We look forward to many bitter words from spokesmen of the Communist Party in criticism of the stand taken by the Communist Labor Party. We shall not answer in kind. The official documents speak for themselves and inform the membership that we of the Communist Labor Party made conscientious endeavors for unity. The demand of the Communist Party that we enter its convention as individual delegates so that what were termed objectionable elements could be weeded out of our ranks, could not be complied with by the Communist Labor Party. Objectionable elements were just as prevalent in the Communist Party convention. Our invitation to the Communist Party that the two conference committees be named the joint credentials committee to pass upon credentials of both conventions was not accepted and our request for a joint session of the two conventions met a similar fate. More than we did to bring about unity could not be done.

We request an earnest study of the proceedings of the Communist Labor Party convention. We call upon all Left Wing elements to affiliate immediately with the Communist Labor Party.

## MINUTES OF THE LEFT WING CAUCUS EVENING, AUG. 29, 1919

Minutes of the Left Wing Caucus, held Aug. 29 at 8 pm, the evening before the convening of the Emergency National Convention. The purpose of the caucus was to decide upon plans of action upon the floor of the Emergency Convention.

A. Wagenknecht called meeting to order and stated purpose.

A. Wagenknecht elected Chairman.

E.B. Austin elected Secretary.

52 Delegates present.

Reports from various states were had.

Motion carried: that all persons who are not delegates be excluded from the meeting.

Statement of National Left Wing Council concerning their attitude towards the new Communist Party, read by C.E. Ruthenberg.

Motion carried: that those present hereby agree to abide by the decisions of the caucus or notify the chairman if they intend to act otherwise.

John Reed made statement regarding the National Left Wing Council.

Motion carried that we proceed to outline a program of action for participation in the National Emergency Convention and that no other business be considered.

Motion that Ruthenberg's statement be accepted as basis for such a program, lost.

Motion carried that a committee be appointed to prepare a program of action.

Committee elected: Prevey, Ruthenberg, Katterfeld, and Reed.

Report of the Committee.

If the Ohio Delegates are admitted to the Hall, Wagenknecht endeavors to call the convention to order.

If for ANY reason this cannot be done, we do act withdraw on that account.

Chairman: Coldwell of Rhode Island; Vice-Chairman: Kate Greenhalgh; Secretary: Wolf of New Jersey; Assistant: Zitt of Ohio.

When roster of delegates is read we make effort to include ALL regularly elected delegates, but failing we

do not withdraw.

Credentials Committee: Reid of Rhode Island; Zimmerman of New Jersey; Owens of Illinois; Sandberg of Illinois.

When Credentials Committee reports we make this our minimum demand: "Ohio and all Left Wing delegates against whom no contesting delegates appear must be seated without further contest.

If they are not seated, we withdraw and meet in our own hall for conference.

Upon completion of the permanent organization, our fundamental resolution will be offered, and we exert every ounce of our strength for its adoption. If we fail, we withdraw to our own hall for conference.

No one shall withdraw on their own initiative. We stand or fall together.

If we participate under Germer's roster, we do not thereby recognize the old NEC nor Germer as Secretary. We do it merely in order to give one last opportunity to the other side to aid in the effort to enforce the expressed will of the Party's membership to transform the Socialist Party into a Party of Revolutionary Socialism and to affiliate it with the Communist International of Moscow.

Resolutions to be introduced immediately contested delegates were seated:

Whereas, the Party membership by overwhelming majority elected as the National Executive Committee a committee representing the revolutionary elements in the Socialist Party and also elected International Delegates committed to Revolutionary Socialism and the Communist International, and further declared itself in favor of affiliation with the Communist International, and

Whereas, the National Executive Committee in expelling the Russian, Lithuanian, South Slavic, Ukrainian, Hungarian, Polish, and Lettish Federations and the States of Michigan, Massachusetts, and Ohio, and in refusing to tabulate the vote on various referendums and in keeping the duly elected National Executive Committee from assuming office, did so to eliminate the elements which stood for uncompromising, revolutionary Socialism, as expressed in the program of the Left Wing, from assuming control of the party and to hold the party machinery for the representatives of moderate Socialism.

Therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that this convention declares its adherence to the revolutionary principles of the Communist International and to carry out the wishes expressed by

the membership by referendum vote, declares the suspension of the Russian, Lithuanian, South Slavic, Ukrainian, Hungarian, Polish, and Lettish Federations and the States of Michigan, Massachusetts, and Ohio null and void and recognizes the new Executive Committee of the party and its national secretary as the officials of the party, and instruct Germer and the old National Executive Committee to immediately turn over all properties and appurtenances of the National Headquarters to the new officials.

Motion carried that report of committee be adopted in entirety.

Motion carried that Coldwell be selected as candidate for temporary Chairman.

Wolf elected as candidate for temporary Secretary.

Zitt elected as candidate for Assistant Secretary.

Harwood elected as floor leader.

Floor committee elected: Richardson, Ruthenberg, Gitlow, Katterfeld, and Reed.

Motion carried: that all matters decided upon by the floor committee be acted upon as a unit by all present.

The following were elected as candidates for the credentials committee: Reid of Rhode Island; Zimmerman of Indiana; Petzold of New Jersey; Owens of Illinois; and Sandberg of Illinois.

Greenhalgh elected as candidate for Vice Chairman.

Motion carried that credentials be handed to the floor committee by contested delegates.

Motion carried that candidates for temporary offices be made the nominees for permanent offices.

Motion carried that all present meet at 9:30 in the Convention Hall.

Meeting declared adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,  
E.B. AUSTIN, JR.  
Secretary of Caucus

### **MINUTES OF THE LEFT WING CAUCUS MORNING, AUG. 30, 1919**

This caucus was held immediately after the police, directed by Adolph Germer, had thrown all Left Wing delegates out of the Convention Hall, and it

was learned that admission to the Convention Hall was by "white card" issued personally by Adolph Germer.

It was decided by regular action that those Left Wing delegates possessing the (Germer) white cards of admission to the Emergency Convention be instructed to attend the convention sessions and that Comrade Zimmerman of Indiana act as floor leader to carry out the program adopted last night.

A motion was offered to request the new NEC to draft a statement to be issued to delegates. Amended to elect three additional comrades to act in conjunction with the NEC. Both motion and amendment carried and Comrades Boudin, Reed, Baker, and Bedacht were elected by unanimous vote.

Session adjourned at 10:30 am.

LAWRENCE A. ZITT  
Secretary

### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF CONTESTED DELEGATES AFTERNOON, AUG. 30, 1919**

This meeting was one of contested delegates, other Left Wing delegates having secured "white cards" and seats upon convention floor.

Session convened at 3:30 pm as a meeting of contested delegates only. Comrades holding the white cards of admission were instructed to attend the convention session upstairs.

Comrade Katterfeld reported on the operations of the right-wing steamroller delaying action on the contested delegates.

It was decided to elect an Advisory Committee of three to consider the best method of presentation of the individual claims for seats in the convention. Comrades Talbert, Taylor, Wagenknecht were chosen.

All contested delegates were instructed to appear before this committee immediately after this session.

It was moved to send the credentials of all Left Wing delegates to the Convention through a Special Committee and amended that one representative of each delegation contested should accompany the Special Committee.

A motion was passed to the effect that no speeches

other than the mere presentation of facts be offered before the Contest Committee of the Germer convention.

It was agreed to hold a short caucus session immediately after the afternoon session of the convention.

Decided to elect a committee of five to draft a tentative order of business for the first meeting of the new grouping. Comrades Lloyd, Reed, Gitlow, Bedacht, Katterfeld, and Boudin were nominated. All were elected.

Session adjourned.

LAWRENCE A. ZITT  
Secretary

#### MINUTES OF THE LEFT WING CAUCUS EVENING, AUG. 30, 1919

Convened at 6:40 pm.

Comrade Wolf reported in detail on the promised progress of the Contest Committee and the order in which the contest would be considered. It was shown that all the delegates of California were contested; one from Illinois and Iowa; two from Kansas; all from Minnesota, Nebraska, Oregon; one from West Virginia; all from Washington; one from New York; one from Pennsylvania; all from Utah; and one from Wyoming.

It was moved to instruct our delegates to leave the Convention Hall immediately if Convention attempts to transact other business or to adjourn before the final report of the Contest Committee, and to gather in the caucus room below.

Session adjourned.

LAWRENCE A. ZITT  
Secretary

#### MINUTES OF THE LEFT WING CAUCUS AFTERNOON, AUG. 31, 1919

This meeting was held immediately after the packed convention called to order by Adolph Germer decided to transact Convention business without first rendering decision as to contested delegates.

Minutes of the caucus of delegates unseated and

those leaving the Emergency Convention held Aug. 31.

Called to order by Wagenknecht at 2:20 pm.

Crimmins of New York chosen Chairman.

Motion offered to elect a committee of three to draft a statement to the delegates seated in the Germer Convention. Action interrupted to allow a reading of the prepared statement. Amended to refer statement back to the NEC and the additional members.

Amendment carried.

It was decided to allow three delegates from Cook County Left Wing Convention to sit in this caucus with the privilege of a voice. Carried.

Motion to request the new NEC to open the Emergency Convention this afternoon at 5 pm.

Carney made a report that the Germer Convention had discovered that it can seat all contested delegates excluding those from Ohio and some from New York and yet control the convention — and that it had decided to do so.

The committee to redraft a statement offered its report, which was adopted:

#### TO THE DELEGATES:

We, duly elected delegates of the membership of the Socialist Party, have participated in this Convention in order to be able to appeal directly to the delegates on the floor of the Convention.

We call the attention of the delegates to the following facts:

In order solely to retain office, without adequate reason, the National Executive Committee did suspend seven foreign language federations, with a membership of 35,000, and expelled the states of Michigan, Massachusetts, and Ohio.

For the same reason, the National Executive Committee did refuse to recognize the will of the Party membership, as expressed in the referendum votes upon the election of National Executive Committee, International Delegates, International Secretary, and the referendum upon the question of affiliation with the Third International, the referendum upon the calling of the National Emergency Convention, and the referendum to reverse their actions above alluded to — this last referendum being seconded by more than fifteen thousand members in good standing.

The National Executive Committee did repudiate the overwhelming vote of the Party membership to the effect that they vacate their offices in favor of the new National Executive Committee duly elected to take office July 1, 1919, and that they refused to turn over the property of the Party to the new NEC.

The organizing committee of this body, without any reason, did yesterday morning refuse to grant admission to delegates from California, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, New Jersey, Ohio, Oregon, Washington, Florida, Utah, and West Virginia, these delegates being regularly elected delegates against whom no contesting delegates have appeared at this convention, and most of them representing states which have been neither expelled nor suspended.

Other delegates, representing altogether the vast majority of the Party membership, are contested by delegations illegally elected, representing Locals and Branches whose membership exist largely on paper.

We call the attention of the delegates to the fact that when duly-elected delegates attempted to enter the Convention Hall yesterday morning, they were forcibly ejected by the police, acting under the orders of Adolph Germer, former National Secretary of the Party.

The action of the Committee on Contested Seats, in refusing to consider the case of the delegates from Ohio, and the contesting delegates from New York, on the plea that they had been expelled from the Party, shows clearly that the ex-officials in charge of this convention intend to permit only their own handpicked delegates to vote upon such questions as may be submitted to them. Considering that through the exclusion of delegates representing the great majority of the Party membership, it is impossible to bring to bear the will of the Party membership in this Convention, we hereby declare:

That if so far we have taken part in this Convention, it is not because we have recognized either the Old National Executive Committee, or Adolph Germer as National Secretary, or this Convention as legal. We have done it merely in order to give one last opportunity to the illegal officialdom in charge to submit to the expressed will of the Party membership; which is to transform the Socialist Party into a Party of Revolutionary Socialism, and to affiliate it with the Communist International of Moscow.

What has transpired up to now makes it clear that the Party officials illegally in control of the National Office and the Convention machinery are determined at all

costs, and by all means, no matter how foul, to prevent the revolutionary will of the rank and file from finding expression in this Convention.

The action of this official machine in proceeding to conduct further business before the question of seating contested delegates has been decided, in violation of its own previously adopted rule, makes impossible our further participation in this gathering. It is our duty to the Party membership which has sent us here to withdraw to another hall, where we will be permitted to carry out the will of the membership and our duty as revolutionary Socialists, free from the interference of the police and the dictation of a corrupt and usurping officialdom.

We appeal to all those who have at heart the true interest of the Socialist movement in this country, and the Social Revolution throughout the world, to join with us in holding a real Emergency Convention, which will rise to the international emergency confronting the world today, and place the Socialist movement of this country in the front rank of the revolutionary march of the fighting proletariat of the world.

### CONVENTION CALL

The Emergency Convention of the Socialist Party will be called to order at six o'clock this afternoon, August 31st, in the hall on the first floor of this building.

EVERY delegate is requested to be present.

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE  
SOCIALIST PARTY

A. WAGENKNECHT  
Secretary Pro. Tem.

The motion to call the convention was passed unanimously.

The delegates then registered and adjourned to 6 pm.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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