
The Chicago Convention: An Editorial in the *New York Call*, Sept. 3, 1919.

Unsigned editorial in the *New York Call*, v. 12, no. 246 (Sept. 3, 1919), pg. 8.
Regular *Call* editorial writer was James O Neal, who may or may not have written this piece.

It is regrettable that the opening sessions of the national convention of the Socialist Party should have been marred by friction between the two elements that have been contesting for the support of the membership. The expelled members and some whose credentials were contested flocked to the hall early Saturday morning [Aug. 30, 1919] with the view of taking control of the hall rented by National Secretary Germer. These groups were trespassers, and were ejected with some difficulty.

The Department of Immigration had instructed the Chief of Police to have a squad present at all sessions of the convention. This has been no unusual procedure in Chicago and other cities during and following the war. The other convention that met Monday [of the Communist Party of America] received the same sort of attention.

The report of Secretary Germer, showing that of the 200 delegates allotted to the convention, 136 were entitled to seats without a contest, indicates the extent of the schism in the party. But even this figure does not tell the whole story. About 103 of these uncontested delegates are said to be "Regular." That is, they stand for the Social-

ist Party organization, but among them are a considerable number who are uncertain of their course and reserve judgment on matters in controversy. Some have positive convictions that the expulsions of several state organizations and suspension of language federations were not justified, and it will require strong evidence to convince them.

The remaining 33 delegates are strongly sympathetic to the so-called Left Wing, but some of them may be won over if the evidence is strong enough to justify the expulsions. This group has worked within the party organization and was admitted to seats with the other uncontested delegates who organized the convention.

Under the party constitution, the uncontested delegates are required to organize the convention. This provision is a vital one for the convention and its subsequent actions, for the delegates who are seated without a contest are able to choose the committee on contested seats. *The Call* is glad to state that every delegate entitled to a seat, no matter what his views are, was seated, as the convention is evidently determined to ascertain just what the status of the party is and how widespread is the schism.†

†- Bearing in mind that by August nearly 70,000 members of the Socialist Party's January 1919 total of 109,500 were "vanished" by expulsions and suspensions, including the unilateral expulsion without charges or trial of the large state organizations of Massachusetts, Michigan, and Ohio, and the subsequent "reorganization" of these states by tiny Regular rump factions. These "reorganized" states were allowed the full delegations apportioned according to their pre-purge membership levels and were seated at the convention without comment or contest; while elected delegations of other states such as Minnesota and California were challenged on thin pretext. In short, Tammany's candidates and a safe minority of the opponents of Tammany were allowed their seats. The views of those delegates seated without challenge and those eventually seated after challenge were *very much* considered by the party bureaucracy doing the seating, contrary to this editorial's utterly dishonest assertion.

One thing is necessary for our readers to keep in mind. The reports that appear in the capitalist press regarding the convention are less to be relied on than ever. Some Chicago papers have distorted various incidents; one glaring case of misquoting remarks of a prominent delegate occurred on the first day. No report appearing in these publications should be credited as being accurate, and all sensational stories should be accepted with mental reservations until the delegates return home and make detailed reports to the membership.

Important changes are likely to be made in the form of organization, especially with reference to the language federations. Even members of these federations are heard urging some change. It is also probable that instead of following the custom of the traditional political parties in adopting a platform, the convention may adopt a declaration of principles for use in all elections. This

may be supplemented by an election manifesto next year and become the custom of succeeding elections. This would be following the practice of the Socialist Parties of other countries, rather than the custom of American political parties. To the general declaration of principles would be attached the state or municipal election manifestos of the party in state and municipal elections. This method would have the advantage of securing a uniform statement of principles throughout the country while permitting an application of these principles to immediate issues of importance to the working class.

The convention is unquestionably the most important since the Unity Convention of 1901, which united a number of Socialist organizations in the Socialist Party. Much has been learned by harsh and bitter experience during the past 5 years, and we may be sure that the convention meeting in Chicago will rise to its opportunity.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.

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