
Socialists Plan Delegates' Poll on War Question: Attitude of Speakers Indicates Party Convention Will Not Approve Conflict.

[events of April 7, 1917]

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ST. LOUIS.— Its greatest task and its greatest test.

That is what confronts the Socialist Party here in its Emergency Convention assembled as the war clouds grow thicker.

Every one of the 200 delegates reached that conclusion soon after reaching the city. This feeling became more pronounced as the work of this 6th National Convention got under way.

There was no doubt in the minds of the delegates that the party would accomplish its great task and pass through the test with highest possible credit.

Will Take Decisive Stand.

Early indications are that a decisive and determined position on the question of war would be taken by the convention.

This became evident as Morris Hillquit, New York, chosen as chairman for the first day's proceedings [April 7, 1917], was enthusiastically applauded when he delivered the keynote address.

The delegates listened with keen interest as Hillquit outlined the brilliant future that seemed to confront the Socialist movement in the United States and the world following the 1912 National Convention in this country and leading up to the proposed International Socialist Congress to be held in Vienna in August 1914.

"And then suddenly and unexpectedly Europe found itself in the throes of war," said Hillquit. "Now our International lies bleeding at the feet of the all-devouring Moloch of war."

Must Continue Opposition.

He then traced the depression that had crossed the ocean and taken possession of the comrades of the American Socialist movement.

He showed that the Socialist Party was the only considerable organized force opposed to war.

The convention then rose to its feet and cheered as Hillquit declared: "It falls to us to continue our opposition to this war even now."

The convention cheered again as Hillquit said that "the American people are opposed to this war," and again when he demanded that the predatory interests that profit from war must pay its cost.

There were cheers when Hillquit referred to the successful revolution in Russia, resulting in the overthrow of the Romanovs. There was another fresh outburst of enthusiasm when he predicted the overthrow of the Hohenzollerns in Germany and the Hapsburgs in Austria.

May Make Movement.

"Every man and woman at his or her post," he

concluded. "We must organize a strong, militant front to the predatory interests of the country. This convention will make or unmake the Socialist movement in the United States."

Hillquit's address came after National Secretary Adolph Germer had called the National Convention to order in the Planters' Hotel and read the call. Hillquit was nominated for chairman by Victor L. Berger and unanimously elected.

The convention then proceeded with the work of organization. George Roewer, Massachusetts was made secretary, and Miss Elizabeth Goldstein, Massachusetts, and A. Wagenknecht, Ohio, assistant secretaries. Duncan McDonald, Illinois, was made vice chairman. There was little work for the Credentials Committee, the two contests in the Michigan and South Dakota delegations being settled without difficulty.

Debate Over Rules.

Some spirited debate developed over the adoption of the rules to govern the work of the convention, especially over the proposed rule increasing the strength of the proposed Committee on War and Militarism from 9 members to 15.

Delegate Berger spoke in favor of the increased number and gave voice to his feelings regarding the spirit already displayed by the assembled delegates.

"This party will stand no matter what they do in Washington," said Berger. "This party will be the greatest national organization within the International. Let us have a declaration with teeth in it."

John M. Work, Chicago, member of the National Executive Committee, took up the cudgels in favor of a revised national platform when it was proposed to abolish the proposed platform committee.

Wants New Platform.

"The 1916 platform is out of date and contradictory," declared Work. "It is highly essential that we should have a new platform."

Delegate Barney Berlyn, Illinois, spoke for a real platform, declaring the feeling in Illinois for a real platform is intense.

John LaDuca, Translator-Secretary of the Ital-

ian Federation, declared no one is satisfied with the present contradictory platform. The Platform Committee was finally saved.

Greetings were received and read from the 21st Assembly District, Kings County, NY, declaring its opposition to all wars; from Rock Island, Ill., County Committee, declaring we have no country to be for or against; 8 comrades sent a communication asking for a national Woman's Secretary; the St. Paul organization sent a communication taking a stand against conscription, while the Washington organization sent in its wishes for a successful convention.

Real Debate Starts.

The first real debate started when Delegate Katterfeld, Washington, introduced a question that he wanted the 34 candidates for the 15 places on [the] War and Militarism [Committee] to answer. Here is the question:

"Are you opposed to all wars, offensive and defensive, except the wars of the working class against the capitalist?"

According to Katterfeld's motion, this question was to be answered by a "yes" or "no."

"It is unnecessary and a waste of time," declared Duncan McDonald.

"It is not a high reflection on Katterfeld's mental balance to present this question here," declared delegate Winfield R. Gaylord, Wisconsin.

Katterfeld is Upheld.

Delegate [S.A.] Kopnagel, Illinois, upheld Katterfeld's stand, declaring Katterfeld had taken a stand beside Karl Liebknecht.

Delegate [Walter] Dillon, New Mexico, declared the Germans had been fooled into thinking they were attacked, and he wanted to take every precaution against the Socialists of this country being similarly misled. He was, therefore, in favor of putting the Katterfeld question.

"This is not a time to make heroic speeches," declared delegate [Usher] Solomon, New York. "I want to see comrades on the committee of different views. I don't want this to be a rubber stamp convention. If you adopt this motion you will make a laughing stock

of this convention.”

Delegate [John] Spargo, Vermont, declared that “Karl Marx, [Wilhelm] Liebknecht, and Engels could not answer that question in the affirmative. Nor could the younger Liebknecht answer that question in the affirmative. In Russia we would fight for the democratic movement that has developed in that country. If we had a Socialist republic in this country we would fight any invaders.”

“Intolerance hurts the party,” declared delegate Anna A. Maley, Minnesota. “The putting of this question is the essence of intolerance. I hope that the motion to put this question will die without even the support of its maker.”

“I don’t want the European situation repeated in this country,” declared delegate [Frank] Midney, Ohio, arguing for putting the question.

“I have never made a secret of my position on any question,” said Hillquit. “I honestly and sincerely hope you will vote down this motion.”

Hillquit declared that the “yes” and “no” answer was an invention of the devil, that it tended to create a spirit of moral terrorism and mob rule.

Delegate [Adolph] Germer, Illinois, spoke against Katterfeld’s motion, claiming he was not afraid of anyone putting the convention in his pocket.

“I would like to see this Committee on War and Militarism composed of every phase of thought on this question,” he said.

Would Facilitate Work.

Delegate C.E. Ruthenberg, Ohio, said that the putting of this question would facilitate the work of the convention, in that it would enable the delegates to know beforehand for whom they were voting. He argued that the committee thus elected could draft a report in which the convention could believe.

Delegate Algernon Lee closed the discussion, claiming it was impossible to tell where anyone stood on this or any question by just getting a “yes” or “no” answer. He said even Roosevelt could answer yes to this question, that he could say, “I am opposed to all wars — that’s why I want a big army and a big navy.

The Katterfeld motion was finally defeated by a vote of 66 for and 96 against.

Berger for Nationalism.

“While many Socialists do not believe in nationalism I do. I regard nations as much a necessity as families,” declared Berger in his explanation of the stand the Socialist Party should take in regard to the war and militarism in general. “Without nations there can not be internationalism,” he said. “I am simultaneously an American and a Socialist. If I did not believe in nationalism I would not be a member of the Socialist Party. Anti-nationalism can be compared with anarchism. It is not all the same to me whether I am an American or a Chinese.”

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