
The Left Wing Unites

by Louis C. Fraina †

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Article attributed to editor Louis C. Fraina.

The action of the National Council of the Left Wing Section, Socialist Party, and the Central Committee of the Federated Russian Federations in issuing a joint call for a convention on September 1 [1919] to organize a Communist Party, ends the split in the Left Wing forces.

This is agreement, not compromise. It unites the actually revolutionary and Communist forces on both sides. The character of the agreement is shown in the vote: the decision of the National Council was by a vote of *five to two*, and that of the Federations by a vote of *eight to four*. A small faction on both sides, interested more in personalities and clique control than in the Communist Party, opposed this unity of the Left Wing.

The decision of the National Council is in accord with the purposes of the Left Wing Conference of June 21 [1919]. The Conference favored the organization of an American Communist Party; the disagreement fundamentally was on procedure.

The procedure adopted by the majority of the Conference was to wage the fight within the Socialist Party until the Emergency Convention in order to rally the revolutionary masses for the Communist Party. The struggle was to come to a climax at the Emergency Convention. This implied a separate convention called by the new NEC of the Socialist Party, a convention that would at the start separate the Left Wing forces from the reactionary moderates and constitute a Left Wing convention under Socialist Party auspices to

organize a Communist Party. In this way, the struggle to rally the revolutionary masses in the Socialist Party could proceed and the new Communist Party become the historical continuation of the revolutionary elements in the old party. It was a procedure that, assuming the unity of the Left Wing forces, would have achieved great results.

But the Conference split. A minority decided to repudiate the Emergency Convention of the Socialist Party and proceed directly to the organization of a Communist Party.

The division constituted more than a split in the Left Wing; *it was a split of the real Communist elements of the Left Wing*. The breaking of our organization unity would have been unimportant; but the breaking of our *revolutionary* unity was disastrous.

The development of events placed both groups in an untenable position. The minority at the Conference learned that not all who favored a new party were necessarily Communists, and was plunged into a struggle with Centrists.

The waging of this struggle to a conclusion meant disaster. It meant that the Federation comrades would more and more depend upon the non-Communists from Michigan (who are essentially parliamentarians, repudiating industrial unionism and mass action) while the National Council of the left Wing would verge more and more toward the Center. The fatal logic of trying to “put it over” each other would make each group draw farther away from the real is-

†- There was no Associate Editor listed for this issue given the resignation of John Reed. Managing Editor Eadmonn MacAlpine and Business Manager Ben Gitlow likewise resigned from the publication at the time of this issue, leaving the 5 remaining members of the Left Wing National Council (John Ballam, Max Cohen, Isaac Ferguson, C.E. Ruthenberg, and Bert Wolfe) as an editorial committee. It remains possible that Max Cohen or another of these individuals wrote this particular piece, although Fraina seems a much more likely candidate.

sue — the organization of a Communist Party adapted to American conditions.

In the minority that seceded from the Left Wing Conference there was a clique that played petty politics, engaging in a gamble for clique control of the new party.

In the majority of the Left Wing Conference there were Centrists, comrades not concerned exclusively with the organization of a Communist Party but with “modifying” the old party and securing control for themselves as against Germer & Co.

The agreement on a joint call for a convention to organize a Communist Party on September 1 unites the Communist elements in the Left Wing, gives each the opportunity of casting off their non-Communist adherents, and uniting all the Communists irresistibly for the conquest of power in the new party.

There was always a larger issue involved in the secession of the minority from the Left Wing Conference than the small clique interested in control, and that was the Communist Party issue. This issue, on which the Left Wing now unites, evoked an enormous response from the revolutionary masses in the Socialist Party for a Communist Party, making as clear as crystal the sentiments of the Left Wing masses.

There was another factor which destroyed the campaign to use the Emergency Convention of the Socialist Party as the basis for organizing a Communist Party, and *that is the failure of the new NEC to call a separate Socialist Party Convention under its own auspices*. Left Wing delegates who now go to the Emergency Convention are going to a convention of the old NEC, packed by the moderates — a packing that has been more than assured by the expulsion of Massachusetts and Philadelphia since the Left Wing Conference and the coming expulsion of Ohio. In answer to these new conditions, the National Council, realiz-

ing that its mandate was to assure the organization of a Communist Party, has severed relations with the new NEC and the Emergency Convention, concentrating all its forces for the organization of a Communist Party on September 1.†

The controversy within the Left Wing must now end; the few comrades on both sides who are disgruntled with the decision to unite are acting against the Communist Party.

Some of the problems in dispute are still unsolved, but they will be solved at the Communist Party Convention. The task now is to organize the convention, to get an adequate representation of the revolutionary forces in the Socialist Party. Upon this task depends the future of the revolutionary movement in this country.

Comrades of the Socialist Party: Upon you depends a great decision. Upon you is now the task of drawing the logical conclusions of your revolutionary purposes, and rallying to the Communist Party. A majority of the new NEC elected by you has issued a declaration in favor of a Communist Party; this new NEC and you, comrades, must now recognize that *the actual fulfillment of this declaration depends upon the Communist Party Convention of September 1*.

It is indisputable that the old party is not in accord with revolutionary Socialism. Deprived of the stimulus of the Left Wing agitation in the party, it must more and more rely upon counterrevolutionary moderates, more and more become a Labor Party in fact if not in name. It is equally indisputable that the masses in our country need a Communist Party, aggressive, alert, rallying the masses for the struggle against Capitalism. There is but one way of answering the call of our revolutionary comrades in Europe and the Communist International and that is to organize a Communist Party. In spite of all and everything!

†- It should be noted that in so doing the National Council effectively deprived the “new NEC” (which declared itself elected in spite of the abrogation of the 1919 SPA election by the outgoing NEC) of its cloak of legality. With the loss of the participation of Fraina and Ruthenberg, no more than 6 of the 15 members of the “new NEC” remained dedicated to the Left Wing and to the tactic of continuing the fight within the SPA: Kate Sadler Greenhalgh, Fred Harwood, Ludwig Katterfeld, Edward Lindgren, William Bross Lloyd, and Marguerite Prevey. Even among this short list — not a legal quorum of the body — Lindgren’s participation was uncertain. With the loss of quorum in late August 1919 there remained no comparable and effective legal authority of the Left Wing parallel to the National Council. The “new NEC” was thereafter powerless to legally meet and issue a convention call or official directives.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.

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