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# Statement of the Illinois Delegates Who Withdrew from the Emergency Convention and Participated in the Formation of the Communist Labor Party.

[September 1919]

A mimeographed circular letter. Copy in the Tim Davenport collection.

Dear Comrade Secretary:—  
Dear Comrades:—

We feel confident that you will recognize the importance of this communication and will present it in full to the membership of your branch or local.

For several months a controversy has been raging within the Socialist Party over matters of fundamental importance. It was hoped that at the National Emergency Convention in Chicago, beginning August 30th, that the matters of the controversy would be ironed out and that the Socialist Party would follow your mandates as expressed in referenda, adopt a revolutionary policy, affiliate with the Third International, and repudiate the counterrevolutionary elements [within] the party. Recent referenda made it mandatory that the party here in the United States should align itself with the Bolsheviki of Russia, the Spartacides of Germany, and the Communist groups in other parts of Europe. The membership had spoken and we [who] have withdrawn from the convention proposed that the mandates of the membership should be carried out.

Imagine our surprise and indignation when we learned on the morning the convention was called to order [Saturday, Aug. 30, 1919], that former National Executive Secretary Adolph Ger-

mer had ejected many delegates from the hall, calling to his assistance the notorious “Anarchist Squad” of the Chicago Police Department. We need not dwell upon our resentment when we learned that the old NEC had usurped the powers of a credentials committee and for no other reason than an insatiable desire to continue their control of the Party, had contested the seats of more than 50 bona-fide delegates, including the entire state delegations from Ohio, Minnesota, Washington, Oregon, and California. All these delegates were elected as per the National Constitution, and the constitutions of the several states. On the first test vote, after the Convention was called to order by the illegal Secretary, Adolph Germer, the reactionaries polled 80 votes, while the revolutionary elements on the convention floor had about 40 votes. These 40 votes added to more than 50 that were contested would have meant that your mandates would have been carried out. The Socialist Party would have affiliated with the Third International and aligned itself with the revolutionary groups in Europe.

The convention was packed with appointed delegates. The Party membership of New York was more than half expelled, yet New York had 32 delegates, based upon its 1918 membership; Massachusetts had 14 delegates, whereas it should have about 4; the same with many other states.

†- Illinois State Secretary Oliver C. Wilson was a Germer loyalist who was made a member to the 7 member “Temporary” National Executive Committee elected by the 1919 SPA Convention. He later edited the magazine *Debs Freedom Monthly*.

Sunday morning (August 31st) State Secretary Wilson† called a caucus of the Illinois delegates. We were in session nearly four hours, and the stand we should take in the matter of seating constitutionally elected delegates was discussed thoroughly. Most of those present stated they would withdraw from the convention if all bona-fide delegates were not seated.

The second session of the convention was called to order at 2:00 pm Sunday [Aug. 31]. The Credentials Committee was not yet ready to report. Yet the convention proceeded to business. It was then that the Illinois delegates withdrew, and went into conference with the delegates who could not stomach that sort of high-handed proceedings. We discovered that the Credentials Committee had acted in a manner to put the Spanish Inquisition to shame, and that it was the intention of the reactionary elements of the convention to retain control regardless of the merits of the case.

We waited till 6:00 o'clock Sunday evening for the hearing of our claims. We discovered that a policy of procrastination was being employed with the intention of bringing confusion among us. We demanded immediate action of our claims, only to learn that it was the intention of those in control to seat [only] enough of us that they might retain control by a safe margin.

It was then that the National Executive Committee you had elected last spring by a referendum vote† called the real Emergency Convention to order on the first floor of the convention building. We could find no point of contact with

the reactionary group upstairs, and nothing remained but to get down to the business for which you had elected us. Further action on the part of the Germer Convention only goes to prove we were wise in withdrawing when we did.

Comrade Alfred Wagenknecht called us to order and we immediately got down to business. The Communist Labor party was organized to carry out your mandates. It has affiliated with the Third International. It has repudiated the Scheidemanns of all countries — including our own. It has aligned with the Bolsheviki of Russia, Spartacides of Germany, and the Communist groups of the rest of Europe. It has done this because such was your mandate in the recent referendum, by a vote of more than 10 to 1.

The Communist Labor Party has adopted a program based on the fact that we are living in a period of world revolution. It points out that if we would gain the support of the class conscious workers of this country, we must adapt our propaganda, education, and organization to the needs of the revolutionary proletariat. It not only endorses industrial unionism, but proposes measures whereby ONE BIG UNION will become an accomplished fact.

Our resources and facilities are meager at this time, but we are working untiringly. We urge you to withhold judgement until all the facts are before you. Just as soon as we can get to the printers, all the statements and documents will be sent to you, and we are confident that you will approve our action in withdrawing from the Socialist Party Convention when we discovered reac-

†- The 1919 SPA referendum vote to elect a new National Executive Committee was arbitrarily cancelled by the standing NEC and vote-counting stopped when it became clear that a Left Wing slate headed by Alfred Wagenknecht was being swept into power by the party membership. A handful of examples of alleged voting fraud were held up by outgoing National Executive Secretary Adolph Germer to justify this action. The outgoing NEC refused to step aside on June 30, 1919, the constitutionally-inscribed date termination of office and continued with its campaign of mass suspensions and expulsions of its Left Wing opponents. Microscopic state groups of loyalists were hurriedly "reorganized" and allotted full counts of delegates to the August 1919 Emergency National Convention in Chicago. The NEC then referred its decisions to the authority of the forthcoming convention, which it had thus neatly "stacked." By the time two years had passed, over 85% of the SPA's membership was either expelled or left the party under their own volition — and the Socialist Party was essentially terminated as an effective political force in America.

tionary politicians hoped to ascend to power and gratify their selfish ambitions by means of certain cunning manipulations.

In conclusion we would point out to you that the same process that has cause the railroad workers and miners to kick over their reactionary leadership inspires us, and it is our purpose to make of the Communist Labor Party an instrument for the conquest of the class state and the inauguration of Industrial Democracy.

Dr. Karl Sandberg, Chairman.  
Samuel F. Hankin, Sec'y Cook Co.  
Edgar Owens, Sec'y Downstate.  
L.K. England,  
Perry Shipman,  
William Lugge,  
Dr. O.J. Brown,  
O.A. Olson,  
William Bross Lloyd,  
N.J. Christensen,  
Charles Krumbein,  
H.E. Greenwood.

*Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.*

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