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# Minutes of National Executive Committee Meeting Held in Chicago, March 10-11, 1917.

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## Meeting of the National Executive Committee. March 10 and 11, 1917.

### Saturday, March 10. Morning Session.

Meeting called to order at 10 o'clock.

Present: Comrades Berger, Hillquit, and Maley. Comrade [John] Spargo was unable to be present as he was on a lecture tour on the Pacific Coast. He expressed approval of the other members of the committee meeting, any action proposed by the committee on the question of war to be submitted to him by wire for vote.

Comrade [Morris] Hillquit was elected chairman for the day.

[Assistant National Secretary] Bertha Hale Brown was elected secretary for the meeting.

Pending the arrival of Comrade [John] Work, the regular order of business was postponed and an informal discussion held on the question of calling an extraordinary national convention. It was proposed by Hillquit that a call should be issued for such convention to all state secretaries, instructing them to at once apportion the number of delegates to the different localities with vote to follow within a week. Comrade [Victor] Berger opposed the suggestion on the ground that it would be the occasion of considerable controversy and acrimonious discussion. He stated that he favored framing a proclamation to be submitted to the membership by referendum. Comrade [Anita] Maley expressed approval of the plan to hold a national convention.

As a method of procedure, Comrade Hillquit suggested that since Comrade Work had not yet arrived and it being important that all members be present if possible, the committee proceed with the

routine business of the meeting; that the Translator-Secretaries of the foreign speaking federations be instructed to be ready to appear later and take part in the deliberations upon the convention.

The suggestion was adopted.

### Report of the Executive Secretary.

Reported the activities of the National Office since the last meeting of the Executive Committee. In reporting upon *The American Socialist*, he stated that the office should have the services of some Socialist of note who would supply the paper with periodical articles upon important questions. Referring to the Literature Department, he said that there was a large demand for timely literature, notably upon the Boy Scout Movement, Compulsory Arbitration of Industrial Disputes, and Military Training in Public Schools.

### Communications.

From Justus E. Taylor, State Secretary of Nevada, submitting correspondence relative to a controversy existing among the Finnish members of Local Goldfield, Nevada, and stating that the State Executive Committee of Nevada requests a ruling.

The Executive Secretary [Adolph Germer] was instructed to inform Comrade Taylor that the state has control over its membership and that the Executive Committee has no jurisdiction in the case.

From Y. Serviart, Editor of *Eritassard Hayastan*, official publication of the Armenian Social Democrat Hentchagist Party of America, inquiring why the Socialist Party of this country had not made protest against the barbarous treatment to which the Armenians have been subjected by the Turks. Consideration

postponed.

**From William Sheffler, Linton, Indiana,** urging the Socialist Party begin agitation to socialize land, and asking for assistance in having prepared a bill to compel land speculators to sell their holdings at near cost.

Secretary instructed to reply to the comrade that the question was one of party policy and that the National Executive Committee did not consider itself to have power to initiate new movements, and that the question should be referred to the next national convention.

**From A. James McDonald, Clayton, New Mexico,** urging that the National Office place on its list of accredited speakers Comrade Vincent Thomas of Taos, NM, and proposing a plan to establish a Spanish Socialist paper, and offering to assume responsibility of half the deficit arising from its publication if the National Office would pay the balance.

The Secretary was instructed to place Comrade Thomas on the list of speakers, and to inform Comrade McDonald that it is against the policy of the party to finance privately owned publications and also that the National Office did not have the funds available.

**From Frank Pinney, Omaha, Nebraska,** submitting a plan for a municipal exchange.

The Secretary was instructed to inform Comrade Pinney that the committee did not have the authority to initiate a movement such as suggested.

**From Luke Jones, General Secretary of the Australian Socialist Party,** stating his terms for making a speaking tour of the United States, as proposed to the last meeting of the committee. No action was taken. The Secretary was instructed to find out what the cost of such tour would be, and report back to the committee.

The following speakers were endorsed for work as National speakers at such time as their services could be employed: Vincent Thomas, Taos, NM; J.C. Thompson, Texarkana, Tex.; A.E. Welch, Waco, Tex.; Action on the applications of William Simpson and Pierre de Nio were referred pending the receipt of further information.

### *The American Socialist.*

Discussion.

**Motion:** That the Executive Secretary and the Editor of *The American Socialist* [J. Louis Engdahl] be authorized to pay for special feature articles at a reasonable rate. **Carried.**

The Executive Secretary reported that he was meeting with some difficulty in securing second class mailing privileges for the Official Bulletin, and that the post office require that all regular copies should be paid subscriptions, or that the constitution of the party should show that the membership dues include payment for such subscription. After some discussion, the following action was taken:

**Motion:** The National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party hereby resolves that the dues remitted from each state organization to the National Office as specified in the National Constitution shall include subscription to the Official Bulletin of members of the National Executive Committee, state secretaries, national committeemen, state committeemen, state correspondents, and local secretaries. **Carried.**

### **Literature.**

The Executive Secretary reported on the literature on hand and the needs of the department in the way of new leaflets.

After some discussion, it was agreed that Comrade Berger should prepare material for a leaflet on military training, and that Comrade Hillquit write a leaflet on compulsory arbitration.

The Secretary was instructed to communicate with Professor Scott Nearing on the question of preparing a leaflet on the high cost of living.

### **Moving Picture.**

The question of permitting the locals to be circularized in the interest of a moving picture scenario arranged by William Troutman which gives a review of the labor movement of the last 25 years, was submitted for the consideration of the committee.

**Motion:** That in accordance with the well established policy of this committee, we must decline participation in this enterprise. **Carried.**

Reading of letter from Comrade Spargo, who reports that there is a promising field for propaganda

work in Utah and Idaho, and recommending that the names of Comrades Stoney, State Secretary of Utah, and George Spiess, Jr. be placed on the list of organizers.

The question of appropriating \$3.00 per day for three months for work in Utah was laid over for discussion. The Secretary was instructed to place the names recommended on the list of organizers, and to inform the comrades of Utah that our financial drains are too heavy to allow the suggested appropriation at this time.

The question of sending out appeals for the Tom Mooney Defense Fund was submitted.

**Motion:** That the Mooney appeal be sent out to the party locals. **Carried.**

Adjourn to 2:40.

### **Afternoon Session, March 10.**

Meeting called to order at 3 o'clock.

Present: Berger, Hillquit, Maley, and Work.

The floor was given to Comrade Dreifuss, Translator-Secretary of the German Federation, as spokesman for the foreign federation secretaries, to ask for an increase of salary, stating that the high cost of living made the present salaries inadequate. Action deferred until the special order of business was disposed of.

### **Discussion of a Plan to Call a Special National Convention.**

It was proposed that such convention should be called first, to adopt a definite declaration of principles; second, to adopt definite measures for the party during the war if there should be a war; third, to revise the National Platform and the National Constitution.

The Translator-Secretaries of the foreign federations were present and invited to express their views on the plan.

After thorough discussion, the following Translator-Secretaries expressed unqualified approval of the special convention: Adolph Dreifuss (German); Henry Askeli (Finnish); Frank Petrich (South Slavic); Michael Macek (Slovak); Anton Novatny (Bohemian [Czech]); John LaDuca (Italian); N. Juel Christensen (Scandi-

navian); Armin Loewy (Hungarian); J.B. Bailin (Jewish); Comrade R. Andee, speaking for the Lettish [Latvian] Federation in the absence of Comrade Neibut, the Translator-Secretary, approved.

Comrade John C. Kennedy, State Secretary of Illinois, was given the floor to speak on the question, and stated that the great need of the country was some method of expression for those who are in opposition to war, and that the fact that the Socialist Party had called a convention would focus attention upon its attitude in relation to war, and would secure cooperation.

A vote of the committee was taken on the question. Comrades Berger, Hillquit, and Maley voted in favor. Comrade Work voted in favor, with the following comment:

"I preferred and proposed that, instead of calling a convention, the Executive Committee should formulate a policy to be followed by the party in case of war, together with the reasons, and recommend to the membership that same be initiated for a referendum vote. As everyone else was in favor of the convention, however, I voted for it for the sake of unity of action."

Executive Secretary Germer expressed himself as absolutely in favor of the proposed convention.

**Motion:** To issue call for convention. **Carried.**

### **Place of Convention.**

**Motion:** That the date of the convention be set for Saturday, April 7th. **Carried.**

After some discussion it was decided to leave the selection of the convention city to the Emergency Committee after the necessary information had been secured.

A telegram was sent to Comrade Spargo in Oregon, outlining action and asking for vote.

It was decided to fix the number of delegates at 200 according to the proposed September convention [i.e. pending referendum], and the committee thereupon apportioned the delegates to the states according to the average membership for 1916. Following is a list of delegates allowed to each state:

Alabama, 1; Alaska, 1; Arizona, 2; Arkansas, 2; California, 5; Colorado, 2; Connecticut, 3; Delaware, 1; District of Columbia, 1; Florida, 2; Georgia, 1;

Idaho, 3; Illinois, 13; Indiana, 5; Iowa, 3; Kansas, 4; Kentucky, 1; Louisiana, 1; Maine, 2; Maryland, 2; Massachusetts, 10; Michigan, 5; Minnesota, 8; Mississippi, 1; Missouri, 3; Montana, 2; Nebraska, 2; Nevada, 2; New Hampshire, 2; New Jersey, 7; New Mexico, 2; New York, 19; North Carolina, 1; North Dakota, 3; Ohio, 10; Oklahoma, 18; Oregon, 3; Pennsylvania, 13; Rhode Island, 2; South Carolina, 1; South Dakota, 2; Tennessee, 2; Texas, 4; Utah, 2; Vermont, 2; Virginia, 1; Washington, 7; West Virginia, 2; Wisconsin, 7; Wyoming, 2.

Comrades Hillquit and Work were appointed a committee to draft a statement to the membership and to state secretaries.

The following telegram was sent to the members of the National Committee:

“National Executive Committee proposes to call an emergency convention on April 7th in place of the contemplated September convention to determine party policy in case of war and transact other party business. Language Federations unanimously favor plan. Endorsement of National Committee desired. Do you approve? Vote immediately by wire.”

Adjourned to 10 a.m. Sunday Morning.

### **Sunday Morning Session, March 11, 1917.**

Meeting called to order at 10:45.

Present: Berger, Hillquit, Maley, and Work.

Comrade Maley elected chairman for the day.

Reading of telegrams from members of the National Committee.

The Committee on Statement to the Membership reported and after some discussion the following was adopted:

“To the Members of the Socialist Party,

“Comrades: Your National Executive Committee hereby calls a special convention of the Socialist Party to be held on the 7th day of April, 1917, for the purpose of determining the policy of the party in case this country should be drawn into the war and for the transaction of all other business which may come before the convention.

“The action was determined by the unanimous vote of the National Executive Committee. It was over-

whelmingly endorsed by the National Committee. We feel confident it will meet the hearty support of the vast majority of the party membership.

“This summary call for a convention is not a regular proceeding under our constitution. It is an emergency measure necessitated by the sudden gravity of the situation which confronts the country, the working class, and the Socialist movement.

“The time is short. The danger is imminent. Delay may be fatal. If war should break out, our party must present greater fidelity to principle, greater unity of purpose, and greater solidarity of action than ever.

“Only a full and representative convention, followed by a speedy vote of the whole membership can lay down an authoritative, uniform, and effective Socialist course of action against war and during war. Only the determined and concerted efforts of the whole party membership will conserve and strengthen our movement in this most critical period of our history.

“To work, Comrades! Elect your full quota of delegates without delay. Contribute the funds to defray their necessary expenses. The war agitation of our ruling classes must be met by us with redoubled energy. War, if it comes, must not find us unprepared.

*(signed)* National Executive Committee.”

“To All State Secretaries.

“Dear Comrades: In connection with the enclosed call for a special convention of the Socialist Party, I am directed by the National Executive Committee to submit to you the following additional information and instructions:

“The special convention called for April 7, 1917, is expected to take the place of the proposed September convention. In addition to the special purpose for which it is primarily called, it will transact all other business which would come before the regular convention.

“The basis of representation and apportionment of delegates will be as provided in the pending referendum for the September convention, and by the constitution of the party. The convention will consist of two hundred delegates, to be apportioned among the various states and territories in accordance with the average national dues paid for 1916. Upon this basis, your state is entitled to \_\_\_\_\_ delegates.

“As the time is short the usual methods of nomination and election of delegates cannot be followed. It is, therefore, suggested that you at once call a meeting of your State Executive Committee, or take other appropriate measures to determine upon a mode of election which will give the comrades in your state the greatest opportunity for a popular election of delegates with due regard to the speed and dispatch required by the extraordinary circumstances.

“If you should determine to choose all delegates at large, it is suggested that you at once call for nominations to be made by the locals in your state at special meetings to be immediately called for that purpose and that similar meetings be held by the locals at an interval of about one week for the purpose of voting.

“But, if your committee determines to apportion your quota of delegates among the different sections of your state, it is suggested that you make the apportionment at once and call upon each group of locals entitled to elect one or more delegates under your apportionment, to make nominations and to vote on candidates at special meetings.

“In any event, it is desirable that all delegates be elected by April 1st. You are requested to inform this office of such elections as soon as they shall have taken place.

“In view of the fact that the National Office has no funds to defray the traveling and other expenses of delegates, the states or delegates are expected to advance their expenses but the convention will, however, take measures to raise a fund for the repayment of such advances by a special assessment upon all members or otherwise.

“We impress upon you the necessity of prompt action.

(signed) National Executive Committee.”

A communication was read from the Lettish Branch of Chicago, urging that the convention be held in Chicago.

Discussion.

It was decided to leave the matter as arranged, Chicago to have the preference should other things be equal.

The Executive Secretary reported on special and intensive work being done by the organization department.

**Motion:** That we allow the necessary funds to try out the plan of using two women organizers in the western states, the funds to be taken from the Woman's Fund, for a term not at this time to exceed six months. **Carried.**

**Motion:** To call a meeting of the National Executive Committee two days before the convening of the special convention. **Carried.**

**Motion:** That the state of Georgia be given \$15 in *American Socialist* subscription cards or literature each month for three months for the purpose of keeping an organizer in the field. **Carried.**

**Motion:** That one of the women organizers be offered to the state of California for a period of three months to do organization work with special reference to women. **Carried.**

**Motion:** That we assist the state of Texas for a period of three months with \$30 per month for each of two organizers, same to be paid in subscription cards or literature. **Carried.**

Adjourned sine die.

Bertha Hale Brown,  
Secretary.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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