
Left Wingers Capture the Ohio Socialist Convention: Resolve to Rule or Wreck National Party — “Communist Party” to Be Formed.

by Joseph W. Sharts

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Miami Valley Socialist was the organ of Local Dayton, Socialist Party — Charles Zurmuhlen, Secretary.
Attributed to leading member of Local Dayton, Joseph W. Sharts, who was a delegate to the convention.

The delegates to the state convention of the Ohio Socialist Party assembled Friday morning, June 27 [1919], in the large Socialist headquarters hall at 1314 Vine Street, Cincinnati. At the tap of the gavel by State Secretary Alfred Wagenknecht there was opened a session more momentous for the future of Socialism and radicalism in Ohio than any meeting before.

This convention was to determine whether Ohio Socialism was to remain in former paths of propaganda and tactics or be transferred into the new paths demanded by the “Left Wing.”

From the start it was evident the Left Wing element was in complete and overwhelming control. C.E. Ruthenberg of Cleveland, recognized as the leader of the Left Wing element in Ohio, was elected temporary chairman, and Comrade Hacker temporary secretary. This organization of the meeting was later made permanent for the first day.

Left Wingers Write Platform.

The test of strength first came in the election of the “Committee on Program and Municipal Platforms.” Those elected to this committee, which would bring in the report of the “Left Wing” proposition, were all “Left Wingers.” They

were C.E. Ruthenberg, George Bundy, John Brahtin, M.A. Toohey, and Ferdinand Aker.

The other committees — on Constitution, on Organization and Propaganda, on Officers’ Report and Audit, and on Resolutions — were comparatively unimportant.

The Friday evening [June 27, 1919] session was called in Turner Hall on Walnut Street, owing to the Socialist Hall being engaged to the Machinists for that night. Margaret Prevey of Akron was chosen chairman. The meeting was opened with singing “The Internationale.” At this Friday evening session the Committee on Program and Municipal Platforms was first to report. Ruthenberg read a lengthy typewritten report which had obviously been brought to the convention ready made.

It was admitted in later debates that this program had been the subject of discussion in “Left Wing” councils in New York City, and I.E. Ferguson, the Chicago lawyer who has recently risen to prominence on the “Left Wing” wave, had given his opinion upon its legality.

The program declared unequivocally for the “Left Wing,” viz. for limiting political action, relegating it to a mere auxiliary and subordinate position under industrial action, cutting out all agitation for immediate palliative measures, such as

municipal ownership, and insisting upon the abolition of the entire capitalist system through the dictatorship of the proletariat. After prolonged and animated debate, singularly free from personal recrimination, from 7:30 pm till 11:30 pm, the vote was taken showing 47 ayes and 7 noes. Of the 3 members of the Dayton delegation, Farrell and Sharts voted no, and Ferdinand Aker voted yes. Bachman and Van Scoyck of Columbus, on instructions from Local Columbus voted no; Tilton of Derwent, a coal miner, voted no; Mandelkorn of Cleveland, although one of the Cleveland delegation, voted no; and Kentra of Ashtabula and one other voted no.

This program contained also an instruction that Ohio delegates to the Emergency National Convention in Chicago August 30 [1919] shall support this program, and that if the Left Wing is found at that convention to be in the minority, they shall bolt the convention, repudiate the Socialist Party, and form the "Communist Party."

After this victory for the Left Wing forces, the state convention rolled upon its course with very little friction. Those who were not in sympathy with the Left Wingers were too few to make serious objection to anything. All through Satur-

day [June 28, 1919], until near midnight, the reports of the various committees were discussed and voted upon. The convention closed with singing "The Red Flag," led by State Organizer Charles Baker.

The state picnic at Coney Island Sunday [June 29, 1919] was attended by a huge crowd. The weather was ideal for such an outing. In a densely shaded portion of the grounds a platform had been decked with bunting. The original speaker for the occasion had been Irwin St. John Tucker, under 20 year sentence, but for some reason — whether because he was not a "Left Winger" or because he had himself cancelled the date — the arrangement had been changed. Ruthenberg, Charles Baker, Margaret Prevey, and John Keracher of Detroit (State Secretary of the expelled state organization) discussed the issues of the day with a strong emphasis on the "left."

It is recognized by all who participated that this epochal state convention is but the prelude to the national convention which is to meet in August, and that the Socialist movement throughout the country stands upon the brink of a split which may shatter it into many fragments.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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