
Executive Motions of the Left Wing National Council: August 5, 1919.

A document in the Comintern Archive, RGASPI, f. 515, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 3-5.

Executive Motion by Ferguson. August 5th, 1919 — No. 1.

Moved, that the next physical meeting of the National Council be held in Chicago on August 29th [1919], without financial obligations on the part of the National Left Wing Organization to bring the members of the Council to Chicago; and that there be no such meeting between now and August 29th.

Comment: There is no reason for actual meetings of the Council simply by accident of having 4 New York members. At the first meeting it was decided to transact business by executive motions. The further accidental circumstance that the Secretary [Ferguson] is in New York and is a member of the Council is no reason why he should be compelled to waste hours in useless debate from which 2 members of the Council are always excluded, and almost in every instance 3 by non-attendance through reasons of distance, business, or indifference.

The only reason for actual Council meetings at any time would be (1) questions of finance; (2) questions of editorial policy of *The Revolutionary Age* requiring consultation with the Editor (Louis Fraina). All other questions are either purely secretarial or of general policy where all members should be consulted. In the latter case, it might as well be documentary in the first instance, instead of being rehashed in many hours of talk.

In all candor, this motion is not made on general proposition of logic, but on account of the personal situation which has been and is deterrent to the Council work. On the eve of the success of this work — the joining of all Left Wing elements for the new

party which is to carry on the propaganda of revolutionary Socialism — there is the physical possibility for the defeated group within the Council to hamper and perhaps destroy our work. I think the majority of the Council should have the gumption and frankness to dispose of a minority of two who insult us deliberately and show only the disposition to make themselves troublesome. The fact that [Ben] Gitlow and [Jim] Larkin happen to be in New York, and therefore generally of equal voting power with the majority of the Council in the actual meetings, points at once to the absurdity of such meetings. The flourish about bringing [John] Ballam and [C.E.] Ruthenberg here for a meeting, when we have no money for the purpose, and when what is really needed is a joint meeting with the Organization Committee of the Minority Conference group, shows that even our minority members realize that the situation is not fair to the work of the Council.

It is impossible for the Secretary as Secretary to get any guidance from a meeting where Gitlow, [Eadmonn] MacAlpine, and Larking make every effort to trip him up on every statement, public or private, and the situation in the Council has gotten beyond the point where there can be advantage in the criticism of the minority. We must act instantly — and in accordance with the full implications of the resolution adopted in favor of joining the two Left Wing factions together at once. These meetings are a hindrance and nothing else. It is up to the majority to accept the Larkin motion in the sense that the minority of the Council is now without function. They ought to resign, but since they will not meet the logic of their own votes, let the majority of the Council do so.

Motion No. 2 is really part of this motion.

Executive Motion by Ferguson.
August 5th, 1919 — No. 2.

Moved, that [Max] Cohen, Ruthenberg, and Ferguson be constituted a Convention Committee of the National Council with full power to complete all arrangements for a September 1st Convention to form a Communist Party, and to make the call for this Convention in conjunction with the Minority Conference group, or any part of this group.

Comment: The time has come for the majority of the Council to assert itself decisively against the dilatory tactics of a minority which insists on bringing within the Council meetings a rehash of every little New York squabble between the Federation politicians and those who are characterized by the Federationists as the Left Wing politicians. We must complete the convention arrangements at once. Every day is of great importance. This is not time for such silly debate as has gone on within the Council meetings, but a time for action — action to which the minority members of the Council are so bitterly opposed that they instinctively pounce upon every little point as a means of justifying their opposition and preventing progress towards reconciliation.

Nothing in this comment is meant to disparage other members of the Council as to motives or as to service to the labor movement. There is only meant the narrow point that these comrades have lost their serviceability to the Council in the immediate business in hand, and it is only sensible for the majority members to protect the Council work from conscious or unconscious sabotage. It is impossible to convince these comrades just at this moment that New York is not the United States, even with regard to the Left Wing and the Federations. Let the majority members effectually set all such discussions over where it belongs — to the Communist Party Convention — and meanwhile let the sub-committee wind up the work which must be taken care of at once.

Aside from personalities there is urgent reason for a sub-committee, because one meeting will not settle all arrangements, and intercommunication between two groups can be better be handled by 3 men than by 7, the 3 being free from hindrance of the formalities of meetings to vote down a minority which

can tie up the New York meetings of the Council.

As to the Federation question which holds New York in a continual whirl, to the benefit of the Right Wing, only 1 of the 3 named in this sub-committee, myself, is avowedly pro-Federation, so there is now danger that this viewpoint will predominate. The choice of myself to handle the item of the new NEC and its convention; Cohen has been openly anti-Federation and gives New York its representation on the sub-committee through its own Secretary (Cohen being still Secretary of the New York Left Wing). Also there is the geographic situation of myself in Chicago, with Ruthenberg half way between here [New York] and Chicago; and in all likelihood I will be back in Chicago the last half of August.

Executive Motion by Ferguson.
August 5th, 1919 — No. 3.

Moved, that no further appropriations of funds be made by the National Council until August 29th at Chicago, and that all funds be held by the Secretary for expenses already incurred and the surplus as a Special Convention Fund, subject to disposition on August 29th or later.

Comment: This motion simply avoids the question of finances during the interim of no meeting until August 29th. If money comes in, as it will in small accounts at any rate, the National Council ought to have some fund in relation to the Chicago situation, and the chances are already poor enough. We cannot raise money overnight, and never had the situation in control from this viewpoint; and it has been conspicuously the minority members of the Council who have disregarded the work of the National Left Wing from this angle, from the worth motive, however, of promoting *The Revolutionary Age*. The point is that there has never been serious consideration of the National Council as taking complete charge of the Chicago situation, a possibility which should never be ignored no matter what the pressure of *The Revolutionary Age* is due to its present deficit.

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Argument of Ferguson Against Larkin Motion:

Is this time to intrude controversy about the Martens office into the work of the National Left Wing Council? Must we abandon ourselves to the sport of Larkin in hunting down the lies of the Russian Federation? To what end? If the business of the Council were an anti-Federation fight there would be excellent logic in favor of this motion, because the statement is scandalous, so far as the translation in our hands shows. I am not arguing that the criticism against the Russian Federation shall not be made. I am against the proposition of saddling upon the National Council a New York feud, and especially our representation by two bitter anti-Federationists, Reed and Larkin, holdovers from a New York committee never chosen by the Council, a committee which never functioned and has been considered dead even as a New York committee.

When it becomes time to deal with the Martens issue, and it appears that there is reason for making it a national issue of the new party, representatives will be chosen to do so who can speak from a national point of view; whereas Larkin and Reed are both in avowed hostility at this time to the fundamental work of the National Council. Personally I have heard a great deal about this issue as basic to all that is now happening within the Socialist Party, and I characterize this as part of the delusion that the whole American movement is simply an echo of the New York feuds. If there is anything in this Martens issue, and this I think has been grotesquely exaggerated, it certainly is no legitimate affair of the National Council. Let anyone search the record of the Left Wing Conference to show how it comes within our mandate, and he will find absolutely nothing. Or are we direct heirs of all New York Left Wing squabbles?

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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