
Report of the National Executive Committee to the Emergency National Convention of the Socialist Party of America: Chicago, IL — Sept. 1, 1919.

by James Oneal

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The period in which this National Executive Committee has served the party has been one of persecution from without and dissensions within. It has tried to serve the party at a time when normal judgments had been difficult owing to the hatreds, suspicions, and hysterical bred by a world in arms. The material basis of capitalist society has been shaken all over the world, and this has found expression in the whole superstructure of society. All movements have been affected by it, the Socialist movement included.

The fact that the intellectual life of the nations has been affected is evidence of the historical principle that any disturbance or change in the material basis of society must make its impress upon the politics, opinions, and general intellectual life of the nation.

The Socialist Party of the United States faced the crisis in April 1917, in a special Emergency Convention held in St. Louis. The nation was on the verge of war. Previous to this convention the party had issued a number of important manifestos regarding the war and its causes, these statements in each case holding aloft the banner of internationalism.

In 1915 the Socialist Party issued a peace program that became the program of the whole international Socialist movement. It was taken up by the Russian revolutionists and was the basis of the Russian Soviet program for peace at Brest-Litovsk. It became the program of all the other international Socialist groups. The formula of self-determination, no punitive indemnities, and no annexations, first proclaimed by the party in this country, was rejected by German junkerdom at Brest and by Allied imperial-

ism at Versailles. It was a working class settlement that no imperialist could accept.

St. Louis Convention Faced Its Task When US Plunged Into War.

The St. Louis Convention faced its task and, even while in session, the United States plunged into the bloody world struggle. Knowing the dangers they faced, the party delegates adopted a program that reaffirmed its international position. This was approved by a general vote of the party members.

Within a year after adopting the St. Louis program, hundreds of comrades were arrested and an era of persecution set in. "Patriotic" societies organized white terror in many parts of the country. Locals and branches were destroyed, party members were boycotted, and in some states they were the victims of mobs.

Our press was largely destroyed and the few publications that survived were deprived of their mailing privileges. Government spies dogged the heels of party members and in some of the larger cities our headquarters were raided by government officials. Some were sacked by mobs.

A small group left the party after the adoption of the St. Louis program. The conduct of this group has been, on the whole, with exceptions, consistent and uniform. They have attacked the party and its members and acquiesced in the policy of the imperialists, even to accepting the imperialist peace of Versailles and intervention in Russia. They constituted a

small Right Wing, and their desertion and betrayal rather strengthened than weakened the party.

Organization work and public propaganda became impossible in many parts of the country. In some states branches were unable to meet to transact ordinary business. The branches were isolated, deprived of contact with each other, and thus subject to rumors and suspicions. In many parts of the country the only source of information the party members had was the capitalist press. All the resources of the party had to be mobilized for the defense of our victimized members. In spite of the tremendous obstacles we faced, the party managed to secure funds to defend our comrades in court.

Active Socialists Imprisoned In Effort to Terrorize Party.

As though to terrorize the party into a surrender to the dark forces of reaction, some of the best-known comrades were indicted and some sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. Among them is one of the best-loved Socialists in the world, Eugene V. Debs, who is serving a 10-year sentence; National Executive Secretary [Adolph] Germer; Louis Engdahl, editor of *The American Socialist*; William Kruse, Secretary of the Young People's Socialist League; Victor L. Berger; A.I. Shiplacoff; Stanley J. Clark; Emil Herman of the National Executive Committee; and Irwin St. John Tucker.

Frederick Krafft and Alfred Wagenknecht of the National Executive Committee served terms in prison, and Victor L. Berger, in addition to a sentence of 20 years, has 4 more indictments pending against him, besides being refused his seat in Congress.

All the Socialist candidates for Congress in Wisconsin and the State Secretary also are under indictment. No mail whatever is permitted to be delivered to the *Leader*, the party daily in Milwaukee. Some 2,000 Socialists in all have been arrested because of their opinions and the era of persecution is by no means ended.

In March 1918, Local St. Louis initiated a movement for a special convention, which the National Executive Committee considered the following May. In a proclamation to the membership the impossibility of holding the convention was pointed out. Under

the Espionage Act free discussion was an impossibility. Only one view could be heard regarding the war.

To have held the convention would have subjected many comrades to persecution and imprisonment. So the party continued its main work of defending its political and class war prisoners and, outside of some of the larger cities, all propaganda work was practically suspended. Our funds were also being drained and we were often faced with the need of urgent financial aid for some comrades.

New Period in Party Follows Collapse of Central Alliance.

The collapse of the Central Alliance in Europe was followed by a new period in the party. While no definite date may be set for the beginning of the present party dissensions, it is certain that they began to be generally noticeable in January of this year, when the National Executive Committee elected delegates to the Berne Conference, owing to the fact that the delegates elected by referendum could not serve, and the assembling of the Berne Conference in March [1919] made necessary the election of delegates by the National Executive Committee.

The so-called Left Wing members of the National Executive Committee [Ludwig Katterfeld and Alfred Wagenknecht] participated in the election, nominating and voting for candidates. None of their nominees were elected and shortly after the election an organized attack was made against the international delegates by the Left Wing.

It was uncertain whether passports could be secured in time to attend the Berne Conference. The National Executive Committee in session decided that if our delegates arrived at Berne in time and the conference failed to take the position of the party on war and imperialism, we were to withdraw with any elements favoring a genuine working class international. It was agreed that we would not affiliate with any international that excluded the Russian comrades, who were fighting world imperialism, or the comrades opposed to the Ebert-Scheidemann regime in Germany.

Before our delegates could leave the country, the National Executive Committee learned that the Berne conference had failed to respond to its opportunity. It devoted its proceedings to useless bickerings regard-

ing “responsibility” for the war, thus echoing the views of the imperialists of the two alliances. It wasted time in discussing clauses of the League of Nations to be formed at Versailles, ignoring the fact that only a holy alliance of capital could issue from the deliberations of the imperialist diplomats.

Systematic Campaign of Lies Waged Against Party by Faction.

Learning this, the National Executive Committee decided to send one delegate abroad to impart information to the comrades in Europe, informing them of our attitude on international questions. The delegate carried out the instructions of the National Executive Committee.

Yet, despite all this, a systematic campaign of falsehood has been waged against the party by a faction within the party. This faction has falsely claimed that the party is allied with the Berne conference. Our delegate abroad could have attended a commission of the Berne conference which met in Holland on April 24 [1919]. He was invited to attend it. He declined to attend, and sailed for the United States three days before this commission met.

Those members of the National Executive committee who favored the Left Wing participated in the election of delegates to Berne and in all our efforts to get in communication with the comrades abroad. Yet a barrage of falsehoods and slanders has been hurled at the party by this faction and the minds of the members have been poisoned with suspicion. They have denounced the party and its officials as an organization of “Scheidemanns” and “Noskes,” asserting that if the party were entrusted with public power it would murder our own comrades with machine guns and hand grenades.

In no single instance has this faction attempted to buttress these attacks with any official declarations of the party. Our declarations cannot be reconciled with the actions of those in Germany who have betrayed the working class of Germany and the Socialists of the world. Our party press has never given any encouragement to the Noskes and the Scheidemanns and the National Executive Committee has not urged any support of renegade Socialists in any country.

Yet because of the isolation of our members and

the absorption of the party in the work of defending our party members in court, these slanders were accepted in some quarters and the seeds of distrust and suspicion were sown in our ranks in the name of the Socialist Party and its officials and members, who have been maliciously libeled by the dastardly propaganda. We brand those responsible for it as guilty of atrocious conduct unbecoming Socialists. The Socialist Party is not and never will be committed to any support of the betrayers of Socialism in Germany or elsewhere.

Slanders Accompanied by Like Propaganda Regarding Russia.

These slanders have been accompanied with a similar propaganda regarding Russia. The party and its officials, especially the members of the National Executive Committee, have been charged with being “Kolchaks” and “counterrevolutionists,” the implication being that the party has been committed to counterrevolution in Russia, allied intervention, and support of Kolchak in Siberia.

As is the case of Germany, so in the case of Russia, the National Executive Committee and the party in general have opposed intervention in Russia or support of Kolchak and have supported the Russian comrades at the head of the Soviet power against a campaign of international lying.

There has never been a single utterance of the National Executive Committee quoted by the Left Wing to support these slanders. The comrades may rest assured that this faction would quote the National Executive Committee if it could. In fact, ever since the revolution in Russia, the party has hailed it as the first great gift of the International. At every meeting of the National Executive Committee held since the second revolution in Russia [Nov. 7, 1917], the committee has issued some ringing declaration in favor of the workers’ and peasants’ government in Russia.

Our press has been filled with important documents regarding the Russian revolution and its struggle with international imperialism. Rarely has a meeting been held under party auspices that our speakers have not taken advantage of it to present the claims and achievements of the Russian revolution. The party’s position may easily be ascertained by consulting the

party bulletins and the party press.

In view of these facts, the National Executive Committee believes that it does not exaggerate when it charges that those who have engaged in this gross distortion of truth are unworthy of the confidence of Socialists. We do not believe that in the whole international movement there has ever been such vicious and venomous and uncalled for attacks as these indulged in by the so-called Left Wing.

Disrupters Dominated by Motive of Securing Power.

What has been the purpose of these attacks on the party at the very time when its spokesmen were being arrested, some going to jail for long terms of imprisonment?

The press of this faction gives the answer. Throughout the entire period of foul criticism it struck one note. This note was: "Capture the party." In the press, in the party meetings, in the branches, and in the National Conference of the Left Wing, this one note of "capturing the party" is sounded over and over again. The Lefts were not interested in winning the members to any changes in policy or principle. They were dominated by the one persistent motive of assuming power.

By persistent circulation of falsehoods regarding the party's attitude toward the Russian and German questions, the Lefts succeeded in sowing suspicion among the members. They organized within the party deal branches, locals, central committees, and finally a national organization. They arbitrarily substituted their own constitutions, bylaws, rules, and program for the party constitutions; they disfranchised party members, deprived them of the right of serving the party branches as officers or as delegates to central committees and conventions.

An astounding state of affairs resulted. Veterans and pioneers of the movement, who had served the party in many ways for 10, 20, and 30 years, suddenly found they had no rights within the party but to pay dues. Members of the Left Wing, some of them never having joined the Socialist Party, some of them having only a card of the Left Wing, some of them being members only a few weeks, usurped all rights within the party organization. Veterans who refused to sub-

mit to this dictatorship by joining the dictators were left with 2 "rights." They were allowed to pay dues and allowed to keep still!

The conditions in many locals became intolerable. Party constitutions adopted in conventions and approved by the members were repudiated by the Lefts as "bourgeois documents." A suicidal struggle followed for control of party organization. All the epithets used in the Left press were mobilized for use in this struggle. Educational activities of the party came to a standstill and all energies of the membership were devoted to the struggle.

Left Wingers Wreck Attempt To Hold Unity Convention.

The party endeavored to arrange an amnesty convention and this also was wrecked by the Lefts. Representatives of the language federations demanded that it be abandoned and stated they would fight it if arranged. The National Executive Committee desired to secure the cooperation of all organizations opposed to the imprisonment of Socialists and others for their opinions. The Lefts fought this openly inside while the government fought it from the outside by holding up our mail.

The press of a number of the language federations became enlisted in this struggle and the foulest campaign of malignant falsehoods was indulged in. Various states became involved and the "Lefts" finally completed the ruin by meeting in national conference and adopting a program in opposition to the party. Within a few weeks after this conference, their own capacity for uniting the working class became apparent by a nationwide split in their own ranks and 3 Left Wing "National Secretaries" contesting for the allegiance of the Left Wing members.

For a time both wings of the Left Wing denied they desired to disrupt the Socialist Party. During the past few weeks both candidly admit it.

In *The Communist*, of Chicago, issue of July 19, 1919, Alexander Stoklitsky [Translator-] Secretary of the Russian Federation, and one of the most active of the wrecking officials of the federation. Writing of the purposes of the Left propaganda within the party, Stoklitsky says:

For what, then shall we capture the old party? For revolutionary Socialism? **But this slogan was good only**

until the rupture in the party, and for the purpose of rupturing the party.

Organized and Systematic Treachery Openly Admitted.

There is no mistaking the meaning of this language. It is a voluntary admission of organized and systematic treachery “for the purpose of capturing the party.” No agent provocateur of the government or tool of the capitalist class could be more candid than Stoklitsky in this statement. It concedes everything which he and his colleagues in the work formerly denied.

The other wing of the Left Wing makes the same admission in *The Revolutionary Age*, issue of August 23, 1919, though in more guarded language. An editorial in that issue reads in part as follows:

The procedure adopted by the majority of the (Left Wing) conference **was to wage the fight within the Socialist Party until the emergency convention**, in order to rally the revolutionary masses for a Communist Party. The struggle was to come to a climax at the emergency convention.

By comparing this statement with the statement of Stoklitsky of the other wing, it will be seen that it differs only in the phraseology and not the meaning. It is one thing to charge the Lefts with treachery. It is another thing to prove it. When evidence is gathered by the party against them to prove it, the evidence is worth consideration.

But when the factions of the accused voluntarily admit what is charged, there is no room for doubt. Confession of guilt is final in any court sitting in judgment on one accused of an offense. Both wings of the Left Wing stand convicted of treachery to those members of the party who were induced to believe that the Lefts only desired certain changes in the party, not to wreck it.

Evidence of Corrupt Practice in Recent Referendum Shown.

Aside from these confessions of the two wings of the Left Wing, evidence of their vicious and corrupt practices in the recent referendum elections is before you. Everything possible was done to prevent

an investigation being made and reported to this convention. They sought a referendum on the corrupt practices, well knowing that the members of the party, without the evidence before them, could no more pass judgment on the alleged corrupt practices than they could audit the books by a referendum.

They then sought to make the convention itself a failure. They sent circulars broadcast to the members, warning them that the National Executive Committee would probably postpone the convention. Then, in order to deprive the party of the finances that would enable it to hold a convention, they urged the party members not to send funds from the sale of convention stamps to the national headquarters. Thus they tried to force the National Executive Committee to do the thing they warned the members we might do. All of this was a part of the well planned “purpose of rupturing the party.”

But, fearing that the National Executive Committee would hold this convention in spite of all efforts to wreck it, as well as the party, A. Wagenknecht of Ohio, one of the 3 Left Wing “National Secretaries” at the time, heading a group calling itself a National Executive Committee, issued a statement that this group would take charge of the convention. To further the plans for wrecking the party, space was hired in this building, with what results we know.

In conclusion, your National Executive Committee affirms that it has done the best it could against the White Terrorism without and the emotional terrorism within. We hold that there is one principle that genuine Socialists have subscribed to in all countries where they do not control and where they are the victims of capitalist reaction and persecution.

Solidarity of All Groups Before Reaction Urged.

That principle is solidarity of all groups in the face of the reaction. To raise factional questions within the party, no matter how important they may seem to some, at a time when the party has its back to the wall, at a time when foul blows are being showered on it by the capitalist reaction, is to play into the hands of the enemies of the working class.

Yet the desperate factions of the Left Wing have been so indecent, so lost to all sense of solidarity in

the face of the terrorism invoked against us, that not even comrades with long prison sentences before them were immune from the foul abuse and slanders of the Lefts.

This conduct is infamous. No language is too strong to condemn such atrocious proceedings. If such actions are to be accepted as the conduct of friends and comrades, how is it to be differentiated from the conduct of our open and avowed enemies.

For the devoted and class conscious members of the party, we have only praise for their work during the most trying period of the past few years. Neither desertions from our ranks, neither betrayal from within, nor terrorism without, made them acquiesce in the infamies of world imperialism.

Some have suffered martyrdom for their convictions. Some have been ostracized in their communities and some have been the victims of violence. Many are serving long sentences for their devotion to the world's proletariat. Others may yet go to prison cells. Our hearty congratulations are extended to these thousands of comrades who have been tested in this most trying period of the class struggle and the world war.

**National Executive Committee
Welcomes Honest Criticism.**

We have no apologies to make to the Left Wing or any of its wings. The National Executive Committee has tried to make the best of the most trying situation the party has ever faced. It welcomes honest criticism and differences of opinion.

But for those who have wrought ruin in their confessed attempts to "rupture the party," it voices the opinion of the honest members in saying that such conduct is a gross violation of Socialist ethics, Socialist solidarity, and Socialist principles.

The National Executive Committee wishes to emphasize the recommendation it made at its last meeting in May. At that meeting we recommended that this convention should elect another National Executive Committee to serve in the interim until another committee can be elected under the new constitution. We renew this recommendation, as we believe that, owing to the confusion and suspicions fostered by party quarrels, the convention should take over all power of the party.

The new committee can arrange for the election of a permanent executive under safeguards that will avoid a repetition of the practices reported by the committee which investigated the recent referendum elections.

Fraternally submitted,

*James Oneal,
A. Shiplacoff,
Dan Hogan,
Victor L. Berger,
Seymour Stedman,
John M. Work,
Frederick Krafft,
George H. Goebel.*

†- These 8 names represent a bare majority of the 15 member NEC of the Socialist Party, the term of which was scheduled by the party constitution to end July 1, 1919. Not signing the report for reasons of absence or ideological opposition were: Clark, Herman, Hillquit, Holt, Katterfeld, Niells, and Wagenknecht.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.

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