
Why Punish the Socialist Movement?

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Among the agenda items for the coming national convention of the Socialist Party I read the item entitled “constitutional amendments,” a proposition regarding the Language Federations, which, if adopted, would strike at the organic structure of Language Federations as they are now constituted, and through this, I believe, strikes at the activity of the Socialist movement among many workers of various nationalities.

There are 10 sections in all, but the following three sections are fundamental:

Section 2 says: “Foreign-speaking branches shall purchase dues stamps from the state organization and shall function in the same manner as other locals or branches of the Socialist Party.”

Section 3 says: “Foreign-speaking locals and branches may form national propaganda committees to carry on the propaganda in their respective languages, as publishing newspapers, periodicals, leaflets, organizing lectures or speaking tours, and further the agitation among those of their nationality, etc.”

Section 6 reads: “When a Language Federation has been organized, the branches affiliated therewith shall purchase their dues stamps from their respective State Secretaries at the same price which the English-speaking branches pay. The State Secretaries shall remit monthly to the respective local organizations an amount equal to one-half that which is paid by English branches as local dues and shall also remit 10 cents for each stamp sold to such Language branches to the organization and propaganda committee of the federation with an itemized report of the stamps sold to the respective branches.”

Reverses Present Policy.

The proposition as propounded above is, in regard to money remittance, just the reverse of the present status of Language Federations in the Socialist Party today. While I don't know upon what ground the contending parties submitted the above paragraph as agenda to the national convention, it is very clear that they are aiming at the controlling point of the federations' organization system. The reason for their action seems to be this: the Socialist party should be centralized; this can be uniformly done only by abolishing the Language Federations system which is in operation today.

The attempts to deprive Language Federations of their autonomy is not new; that it is renewed again only shows that there are still forces in the Socialist Party working against them. Until now their attempts were defeated solely on account of wise counsel prevailing in State and National Executive Committees. Shall this be different in the future? From the above motions one would judge that such might be the case. Why? Because it fits the situation?

Says Autonomy is Wise.

From our past experiences we know that the autonomy in organization work in a Socialist movement of a heterogenous country like America is wise, and have acted accordingly. With the autonomy we did not mean the "autonomy" that goes beyond the organization work; that is beyond the means which makes an organization able to do the work that is in the line of Socialist propaganda as outlined by party functions — in short, an autonomy that means maintenance of Socialist literature, books, papers, speakers, meetings, etc. In other words, there must be a central body with a central office. Such office is an office of Translator-Secretary, who works in harmony with the rest of functionaries of respective language groups and with the Socialist Party officials. All such functions are necessarily based upon a budget.

Now, how would a federation function properly, and how would the whole movement function properly, if it would have to depend upon a budget of which it would not know whether it would be forthcoming or not? Yes, those things would be in the constitution, all right, but we have many things in the constitution that because of very good and sufficient reasons cannot be fulfilled, even if we would

like to fulfill them. And according to the above proposition, such budget for Language Federations in the control of various state and local committees, which would receive remittance from state organizations, would be of very speculative nature for the functionaries of such federations.

No responsibility for carrying Socialist propaganda in the language groups would go with it. It would mean just a controlling income for the state organizations, but not a controlling expense for the language groups.

Opposed to Centralization.

I doubt if comrades who proposed the above motions themselves think that the Socialist Party must be centralized in such a manner, or that it must be centralized at any price, no matter what happens to the work that is best known to those who are able to do it among millions of workers of foreign birth for Socialism in America. No, we are not centralizing things for the same of the names only, but because we do sometimes [find] out that such things would better serve the purpose in the conditions under which we must work. We not only centralize for that reason; we also allow autonomy for that reason. We have allowed the present status of Language Federations in the Socialist Party for the same reason; we have declined to adopt unconditionally the 21 Points submitted by Moscow International for the same reason, etc. Not sentiment, but conditions under which we must live and work for our aims are for us the determining factor in adopting the tactics.

Have the proponents of the above-named articles a better reason for abolishing the present status of Language Federations in the Socialist Party than were known to us up to the present time for maintaining it? If so, I would like to know them.

There are economic and social forces working right now in the midst of us for a great homogeneous country, or rather spirit, which will bring a homogeneous new international about; but because this is taking place, should we be so foolish to kick ourselves in the face?

Who are the forces that are trying to lead the Socialist Party into a blind alley and through it to punish the Socialist movement?

Edited by Tim Davenport

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