
“Farewell!” to the Socialist Party: An Appeal to Its Remaining Members.

Statement by the Committee for the Third International of the Socialist Party to the Members of the Socialist Party.

Published as the second part of the pamphlet *Go to the Masses! A Manifesto of the Third Congress of the Third International. Also the Withdrawal Statement of the Committee for the Third International of the Socialist Party to the Members of the Socialist Party.* (Workers' Council Pamphlet no. 1). (NY: Workers' Council, n.d. [1921]).

Comrades:—

For three years a constant struggle has been carried on within the Socialist Party to secure an adaptation of its principles, policies, and program to the new conditions growing out of the world war and the Russian Revolution.

In three national conventions, at Chicago, 1919; New York, 1920; and at Detroit, 1921, as well as between conventions, the fight has been kept up, to place the Socialist Party in the front rank of the international labor movement, in the vanguard of the world struggle for Socialism.

The last National Convention of the Socialist Party, at Detroit, in June, definitely displaced the party as a force working for Socialism, definitely aligned it with those elements in the labor movement that refuse to profit by the experiences of the world war and the years of the imperialist “peace” which followed it. It threw overboard the rich lessons of the establishment of the first great Workers' Republic, of its years of heroic and successful struggles against a worldwide alliance of the forces of imperialism and treacherous would-be Socialism. The Socialist Party has thus become a hindrance rather than an aid to working class progress.

The Committee for the Third.

The Committee for the Third International

within the Socialist Party was organized for the explicit purpose of bringing about the party's joining the Third International on the basis of the announced “21 Points.” Yet the Committee did not at all assume that its task to arrest the actual process of disintegration of the party would be solved by merely having the party accept the 21 conditions of application. In fact, the Committee did not pretend to accept all and every opinion expressed by the Third on conditions in and tactics to be applied to the United States. It merely held:

“That all discussion as to the applicability in the United States at the present time of one or the other point of tactics as proposed by the Third International should be carried on with the International, not outside of it.”

The issue at stake was not merely an affiliation with the Third. Principles and tactics of outstanding importance were involved. The issue of international affiliation was but the clarion call, the Third International standing out as the symbol and the incarnation of a world party of aggressive Socialist action. The inevitability of the reorganization of the party and its adaptation to new conditions was pointed to, lest it voluntarily sign its own death warrant, and acquiesce in its own burial.

The Recent Past.

With the issue of affiliation with the Third International the Committee set out to work, sparing no effort and missing no opportunity to carry its point during the months of agitation prior to the Detroit Convention. But it did not confine itself to mere advocacy of affiliation with the Third. An animated discussion of all the principles and tactics involved was forced to the fore. The spirit of the Third was held up as the big subject for discussion.

Of course the party leaders did not welcome our activity. They met the Committee with animosity. The party chiefs, who on numerous occasions claimed to be desirous of the party's affiliation with the Third International were particularly venomous in their attacks upon the advocates of the Third. Speaking the minds of the party officialdom, the National Secretary [Otto Branstetter] placed on the agenda of the Detroit convention the infamous resolution which proposed to expel every member favoring affiliation as one "who works either for the Communist International or for the Department of Justice and in either case — in the interests of American capitalism."

The Detroit Convention.

At the Convention the leaders strategically retreated from the position of doubtful vantage that the adoption of this resolution would have given them. They made it clear, however, that the "expulsion motion" would be enforced locally, the prevalent state and local autonomy giving the local chieftains the right to do what the national leaders thought wise policy not to stress too strongly.

The Convention, reduced to 35 delegates, most of whom were national office appointees and retainers, voted 31 to 4 against unconditional affiliation with the Third. By this act the Socialist

Party read itself out of the fold of the international revolutionary working class movement. The Convention decisions on other matters of principle and tactics were reactionary enough to make the party unfit to join the so-called Second International. Even that body of counterrevolutionary and bourgeois-government Socialists is too revolutionary for the Detroit majority of the Socialist Party.

The Detroit Convention sounded the death knell of the Socialist Party. It lives today only as a painful survival, a reproach to its own past. Even the official party press could no longer hide its bankruptcy, and proceeded to boast of its shame.

The *Call*, the New York party daily, summed up the work of the Detroit Convention as a "return to normalcy." The paper discovered that "the Convention made progress and that it demonstrated more unity of opinion and policy than any gathering since the war swept over the world..."

That unity of opinion had been gloriously demonstrated in the action on the question of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, where, according to the official party and publicity manager, "the convention was so hell bent on taking no stand at all, that it took no action on a motion committing the party to a stand that says that it took no stand."

On the question of proletarian dictatorship the Convention turned down all five motions placed before it. The resolutions favoring it, against it, proclaiming it to be of no concern to the party, considering it inopportune, and providing for no stand on the principle, were all defeated in monotonous and systematic order.

Prompted seemingly by the same yearning for "unity" the Convention tabled the resolution dealing with "immediate demands," sabotage, political action, direct action, etc. And what was not tabled went to the next Convention, when "study reports" and surveys will be submitted. Thus went for study the question of party organization, propaganda, and the party daily press. The party still wants to study and investigate — it is so young

and inexperienced.

And yet the convention managed to overreach itself by adopting Hillquit's motion, which opens the way for fusion and political trading with all the highest bidders in the field of political radicalism. There was the Hoan proposition for immediate fusion. The Hillquit motion was to investigate the possibilities of fusion.

No wonder that "this Convention demonstrated more unity of opinion than any before it." Unity of opinion should be easily attained where no opinion exists, and this was notoriously a convention of no opinion.

The Background of Detroit.

Undoubtedly the Detroit Convention did not present a totally new and radical change of attitude in our party. The Detroit actions were largely foreshadowed by the National Convention of 1920. It was that convention that marked the retreat of the party from its advanced position in the world of labor and Socialism. The 1920 Convention yielded to the demands of the membership and nominated for the US Presidency our noble martyr Eugene V. Debs and simultaneously forced on the party and its revolutionary candidate a reactionary national platform. The crying shame of that convention followed upon the heels of the Albany ouster proceedings where the party defence proclaimed obedience to bourgeois legality to be the cardinal virtue of a revolutionary movement and respectability its reward. It was the work of the New York Convention that forced Comrade Debs to say to the party committee which tendered him the nomination for the Presidency:

"I must be perfectly frank with you. I have read the platform and I wish I might say that it had my unqualified approval.... It could have been made more effective if it had stressed the class struggle more prominently and if more emphasis had been laid on industrial organization...."

And he added the very significant words of grave warning:

"I have always been a radical, never more so than now. I have never feared becoming too radical. I do fear becoming too conservative. We must guard against any policy or attitude of fear to state our position clearly.

"Socialist platforms are not made to catch votes. Our purpose should be to state principles of the party clearly to the people. THERE IS A TENDENCY IN THE PARTY TO BECOME A PARTY OF POLITICIANS INSTEAD OF A PARTY OF THE WORKERS. THAT POLICY MUST BE CHECKED, NOT ENCOURAGED."

The policy or tendency in the party to become a "party of politicians instead of a party of the workers" was not checked. The party went the full length of it, until it is no more a tendency. It is an accomplished fact.

Political compromise and abandonment of the Socialist faith did not save the party from thorough collapse. With a doubled electorate the party ticked equalled only its vote in 1912. The organization once 120,000 strong came to the New York Convention with 38,000 and to Detroit with 17,000 members. The accelerated withdrawal of groups and individual members since Detroit, which has still further reduced its numbers, is a testimonial to the party leaders for their achievements at the convention.

The Task Ahead.

Our agitation in the party has aroused a great many members. It bore all the fruit it could. There is no further need for influencing the remaining members in the party through working from within. There is no longer the danger of leaving the membership in the custody of a leadership that either leads it nowhere or in the wrong direction. The truly Socialist elements in the party are rushing out of it, disgusted, disheartened. They lack, however, a constructive plan of action. Merely leav-

ing the party to those who approve of its reformist policies and tactics is insufficient. We must organize to get out and get out to organize.

This is why we say to all the true Socialists in the Socialist Party:

The Committee for the Third International sees no further reason for staying in the Socialist Party. It believes the Socialist Party has completely and beyond recovery outlived its usefulness as an agency for propaganda, and an instrument for the realization of Socialism.

We prophecy the early demise of the Socialist Party and call upon all those who read the future as we do to get ready to quit the ship that no longer sails the flag of working class Socialism.

But then the next step must follow. A new home for constructive revolutionary Socialism must be built. Another political party of the working class must be established with the passing of the Socialist Party. It must be alive to the problems of the revolutionary age, as well as imbued with the keen sense of reality without which a working class party will be built on "a rope of sand." To the fulfillment of this task we call all of you, comrades, in and out of the Socialist Party. To the work along these lines we pledge our own energies, loyalty, and service.

Comrades: Organize for the purpose of getting in touch with us and prepare for a conference, which will be called in the near future and where definite plans will be worked out and the foundation laid for a powerful American Section of the Third International.

Forward in the struggle for the realization of an irresistible party of the world's disinherited.

SIGNERS OF THE WITHDRAWAL STATEMENT:

MINORITY DELEGATES, NATIONAL CONVENTION, 1921 DETROIT: J. Louis Engdahl and William F. Kruse, Illinois; H.L. Flanagan, Southern District; C.W. Kirkendall, West Virginia; Otto Newman, Pacific Northwestern District; Charles Kolarik, Bohemian Socialist Federation; I.B. Bailin, Jewish Socialist Federation.

MINORITY DELEGATES, NATIONAL CONVENTION, 1920 NEW YORK: Steven Bircher, New Jersey; Benjamin Glassberg and Alexander Trachtenberg, New York.

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE FOR THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY (in addition to the above): Paul P. Glaser, Indiana; Morris Backall, M. Baumstein, Louis T. Herzon, Ralph Henderson, Henry E. Wickwire, and Hyman Schneid, Illinois; Rose Weiss, New Jersey; J.B. Salutsky, M.J. Olgin, Alexander Carlin, and George Wishnak, New York.

Send all your communications and request for information to J. Louis Engdahl, Secretary, 80 East 11th Street, New York City.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2005. • Free reproduction permitted.