
SDF is Launched at Convention of 19 States: Organization Formed to Serve as Instrument for Socialism and Basis for National Labor Party [events of May 29-31, 1937]

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PITTSBURGH.— Delegates from 19 states, the District of Columbia, and language federations formerly affiliated with the ruined and tattered Socialist Party now controlled by a handful of Trotskyists, witnessed the rebirth of the American Socialist movement at the first national convention of the Social Democratic Federation held here over the weekend [May 29-30, 1937]

It will be the purpose of the federation to unite all Social Democrats in one organization, while acting as a nucleus for a national Labor Party by seeking to bring about the cooperation to this end of labor, farmers, and all toiling elements of the population.

Represented at the convention were virtually all the elements comprising what was sane and constructive in the old Socialist Party, elements who either were expelled from the party at Cleveland a year ago [May 23-26, 1936] or subsequently left it because they could no longer tolerate the destructive Communistic policies and leadership which have brought the party to its present state of utter chaos and impotence.

Permanent and National.

Amid scenes of indescribable enthusiasm and unbending determination to rebuild the Socialist movement on the firm foundation of high idealism and true comradeship, the convention established the Social Democratic Federation on a permanent and nationwide basis.

Mayor Jasper McLevy of Bridgeport was elected National Chairman.

A National Executive Committee representing the best traditional thought and aspirations of American Socialism was chosen to guide the federation for a period of one year, until the next convention.

Permanent national headquarters are to be established in Washington, with a national secretary and a competent and adequate staff. The complete machinery of the federation will be in working order within a few weeks. Meanwhile, the national office will be in Pittsburgh under the direction of Sarah Limbach.

Declaration of Principles.

The convention adopted a Declaration of Principles embodying the ideas and ideals of international Socialism as represented by the great Socialist and Labor parties affiliated with the Labor and Socialist International, and took steps looking toward affiliation with the LSI.

The flag of Socialism, dragged in the mire by those who staged the pogrom on the American Socialist movement at Cleveland, was again raised by the Social Democratic Federation. It is the grand old flag that had been carried for decades with so much devotion and sacrifice by scores of thousands under the leadership of Debs, Hanford, Hillquit, Berger, Kirkpatrick, and other chieftains and pioneers.

Resounding cheers and the strains of "The Internationale" rocked the convention hall as old veterans and young comrades, their minds working in unison and their hearts beating as one,

vowed to keep the flag flying and plant it in the van of the millions of American toilers now engaged in a titanic conflict for emancipation and preparing to march with unconquerable step towards the rising sun of Socialism.

All Forces Represented.

With the sole exception of Wisconsin, the only substantial organization still officially a part of the Thomtrotskyist "party," all the worthwhile forces in the old organization were represented in the convention, headed by New York, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania.

Wisconsin had an unofficial observer. An invitation to join the new federation will be addressed to Wisconsin by the National Executive Committee, in accordance with instructions of the convention.

The delegates felt confident that before long the Socialists of Wisconsin, who have no place in the "all-inclusive party" now rapidly approaching extinction, will be in the ranks of the Social Democratic Federation.

Plea for Labor Peace.

To the great and throbbing American labor movement as a whole the convention addressed a message, not of internecine strife, but a plea for unity as essential to the preservation of labor's gains and the successful performance of its historic mission.

Reaffirming the old Socialist belief in the principle of industrial unionism as essential to successful organization of the mass production industries, and disclaiming any desire to interfere in the internal affairs of the trade unions, the convention appealed both to the American Federation of Labor and the Committee for Industrial Organization to "take the road of reconciliation," to compromise their differences on a basis agreeable to all, so that labor may continue to advance as a united, unbeatable army.

In the Declaration of Principles, in resolutions adopted, in the stirring keynote address delivered by Louis Waldman, and in the fervent utterances of other speakers, the Social Democratic Federation speaks the old but ever new language of working class solidarity, working class self-reliance, and working class action in both industry and government.

Unity on the economic field and in political action! Democracy in Socialism and Socialism through democracy! Idealism and realism!

True Socialism.

Socialism not through violent revolution — “the barbarous method of progress” — but through organization, discipline, constructive action, the unity of all who work, of all who toil and suffer! Socialism not through hate but through human brotherhood! The new society built not upon mountains of corpses but upon the shoulders of living millions, clear of mind, strong of heart, building the new order, with each step ever surer, ever bolder and more sweeping, laying the bricks of the edifice of Social Democracy upon the solid foundations of liberty, of science, of intelligent, conscious effort! This was the message addressed to the American people by the convention. This is the teaching the Social Democratic Federation will carry to all corners of this land.

Keeping in mind the peculiar circumstances confronting American Socialists in the present turbulent transition period, the convention adopted a constitution for the Social Democratic Federation designed to make it possible for the organization and its components to function as Socialists within the fold of the SDF wherever opportunity presents itself to advance the cause of labor and Socialism.

Flexible Organization.

Under the constitution, organizations like Pennsylvania and Connecticut, which retain title to the Socialist Party, may con-

tinue to function as such. At the same time they are free to combine in such manner as they deem necessary and feasible with Labor parties should the organized labor movement in the states mentioned decide to embark upon independent political action. SDF organization in states such as New York may join with labor parties of bona fide program and character. Elsewhere, SDF state and local organizations will function as agencies of Socialist education and propaganda, working side by side with labor unions and with progressive organization whose program and character are not at variance with the aims and ideals of the SDF.

At all times and everywhere SDF state and local organizations, as well as other affiliates, such as foreign language federations and others with whom contact may be established on the basis prescribed by the constitution, will retain their identity and function as parts of the national Social Democratic Federation.

A Program Clearly Social.

On a wider, national scale, the National Executive Committee will seek to bring about unification of all labor and progressive forces aiming at the formation of a Labor Party or a Farmer-Labor Party with a program clearly social in purpose.

Thus, it is planned to keep the Social Democrats of the nation functioning as an organized force within the SDF while seeking to create the framework for a larger, comprehensive Labor Party.

In New York, the SDF will remain affiliated with the American Labor Party.

With the nation in a state of transition, with political lines cracking and old party divisions assuming new and as yet uncertain forms, with encouraging manifestations in the direction of independent political action in many states and localities, the SDF convention took the view that no rigid policy could be prescribed for state and local affiliates, but that ample room and flexibility must be given for such adjustments as may appear

wise and justified from the viewpoint of the principles and aims of the SDF.

A United Force.

Above all, the purpose of the SDF will be to keep the Social Democrats of the nation functioning as a united force.

At its very first meeting Monday morning [May 31, 1937], the NEC proceeded to carry out the instructions of the convention with respect to perfecting the organization and mapping out a program of activity in the political, labor, educational, and general propaganda fields.

Important committees to deal with the various aspects of activity to be pursued were appointed. Plans were completed for intensive organization drives in unorganized states....

The following states were represented in the convention: New York, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Illinois, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, California, Florida, Georgia, Texas, Minnesota, and West Virginia.

Represented also were the Jewish Federation, the Forward Association, *The New Leader*, and the Socialist Women's Committee of New York.

The Finnish Socialist Federation was represented by an observer.

Following are the members of the National Executive Committee of the Social Democratic Federation: Jasper McLevy of Connecticut, chairman; D. Gertler, Illinois; Darlington Hoopes, Pennsylvania; Algernon Lee, New York; Sarah Limbach, Pennsylvania; Leo Meltzer, Massachusetts; Dr. S. Neustadt, Maryland; Carl Rhodin, Connecticut; Edward C. Thompson, New Jersey; Louis Waldman, New York.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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