
What'll Folks at Home Think of this "85-45" in Convention Wrangle?

by Eugene Wood

Published in the *New York Call*, v. 12, no. 244 (Sept. 1, 1919), pg. 2.

CHICAGO, Aug. 31 [1919].— The national Socialist Emergency Convention, in session here, waited all day upon the decision of the Committee on Contests. No business could be transacted until the membership of the convention had been settled. So, in one of the rooms of the old Illinois Club, in the bay window, sat the judges.

Purposely repressed in voice, and on the chair immediately in front of them sat the spokesman of the delegation whose right to the floor was denied by the National Secretary. These did not speak in cold half voices. They had an almost irresistible tendency to employ the soapbox manner and turn to the rows of seats which fill the long room and to those who line the walls on either side.

Wholehearted Accusations.

The mutual accusations of wholehearted, bold, and energetic fraud are varied from time to time by some such pathetic case as that of Nebraska, where the State Secretary, on the job only 2 months, could not get word to the locals in the state, could not call a meeting of the State Executive Board because they wouldn't pay any attention, did not send notices by mail to the members of the party, but announced in a local labor paper that there was going to be an emergency convention of the party and to make nominations right away, please, in all the state; in all the state, mind you, there were 12 votes cast to elect delegates, 5 in the city of Omaha and 7 members-at-

large. Contesting these seats were two others. The Jewish Branch of Local Omaha, by some piece of luck, got word that there was going to be a convention and, though they were a little bit late, they managed to have an election and nominated two to come to Chicago, polling a vote of 27 for one and 25 for the other.

"You do not give your entire time to acting as State Secretary?" asked one of the committee of the young man who appeared on the seat before the committee.

"I give my spare time, and more of it than I can afford," he answered, with a rueful smile. Well, we all know how that is.

Whisperers and Thrillers.

A boy like that a person's heart goes out to, but to the "thrillers" who swing their arms and talk about "class-conscious revolutionary movements" and use a Madison Square Garden voice to carry four feet, a fellow cannot feel quite the same. For after their oratory and their fervent "by Gods" and thumpings of the defenseless table that never willfully did them any harm, Judge Panken, in a voice that hardly makes any more noise than "Have you a match?" inquires: "In the event that this committee passes favorably upon your credentials, would you abide by a decision of the majority of the convention?"

Sometimes he put it (or maybe George E. Roewer asks in a voice scarcely more audible than

a soft lead pencil): "Suppose that your delegation and all the delegations but one should be seated, would you acquiesce in the decisions of the convention?"

And then they're wonderfully puzzled by the question. Seemingly, they cannot get it into their heads what is meant. They want it repeated, and if a person had been just a little bit keener of hearing, he could hear the wheels in the contestant's head whirring around with, "What'll I say?"

They don't think the committee has any right to ask such a question; it all depends upon what happens as to what they'll do or not do. They do their best to convey the impression that they don't know one blessed thing about the caucus of the Left Wing pledging them all to walk out and join in the formation of a Communist Party if they do not win every last contested seat, lock, stock, and barrel. If they cannot have their own way all the time, they're just going to take their playthings and go right away, so they are. Caucus? What caucus? What do you mean by caucus?

Nobody could be more suave than the committee in making this inquiry. They are reluctant to ask it, they say.

They follow out Isaac Walton's instructions to put the worm on the hook as if you loved him, but the worm does not enjoy it in the least. For, when you have been going up and down declaring that your one desire is to bring harmony and peace, and you are cornered and forced to admit that your notion of peace and harmony is for the majority to take a back seat and let the minority run things, it is not an enjoyable situation.

A Regular Frazzle.

It gives great pleasure, though, to the crowd of Left Wingers who crowd the chairs to hear the badgered contestants finally burst into admissions that they are going down the line, "that they are going the whole figure, "even to the extent of disrupting the party." These who cheer and handclap

and rejoice when the smashing and shattering of the Socialist Party is proposed will form part of the membership of the Communist Party, if it doesn't split into too many divisions. It is calculated that there are at least 6 divisions already in sight. It is believed that this is not so much a split as a fringe, or a broom, or some other word expressive of a complete frazzle.

When you shine up to a man with a narrow piece of red ribbon on his lapel, made to look like an inverted V, with his Socialist button, the first few minutes are devoted to his exposition of the demand for a "more radical stand" to be taken by the party; it must be "more revolutionary," and so on and so on, and if he is an earnest and simple-hearted man, as many of them are, that's about all he asks for, as far as can be determined; but when you talk to a man like [Joseph] Coldwell he frankly says that all that platform stuff is "bosh." It's just "talk."

There can't be any union when there are 45 votes on one side and 85 on the other. They are poles apart. The fact that there are two poles on this earth of ours, and even more widely apart than 45 votes and 85 votes of men and women who believed in the cardinal doctrines of Socialism, and yet the earth goes right along all in one chunk, doesn't seem to get anywhere with them. They have "fired on Sumter." They're singing "Farewell to the Star-Spangled Banner" and "The Bonnie Blue Flag" in a manner of speaking, but the simple-hearted look a little troubled when you ask them if they want to burst up the Socialist Party.

"I would like to do that," they say, and fetch a sigh.

"You've made sacrifices for it in the past?"

"Yes, and it's pretty dear to me; but there's things that aren't done right in the National Office."

"And suppose that were righted — suppose that could all be straightened out — would you want to leave the party?"

"Well, I don't know as I would."

“And how about the members back home who sent you here as a delegate? Would they like to get out of the party?”

“Well, I don't know as they would either. But it'll all turn out right. It'll kind of teach them a lesson to pay more attention to the rank and file and not be quite so bossy and dictatorial. Oh, it's a little bit tough right now, but it'll all smooth over pretty soon. If we could just bring the party up to date a little bit more, we'll just go sweeping right ahead.”

And Another Attitude.

Just contrast that attitude with the attitude of those who frankly say that the whole thing could be straightened out if the convention were to demand the resignations of the holdover NEC and the claimant NEC and put the election of a new NEC to the vote of the party on a referendum, vesting the direction in a temporary Board of Control. “Spit on the slate and rub out everything and write down a new list of national officers. That would settle everything.”

But that proposition they will not make. No. The moment the decision of the Committee on Contests is announced and it doesn't suit them, they blow the whistle and pull 'em all out, and go down to Blue Island Avenue or wherever the “Communist” convention is to meet, and start in, and we shall have to teach ourselves to call 'em “Mister.”

“What's the use, if you're 85 and we're 45?” they ask. And that seems to end it with them. The only thing to consider is the folks at home, who have been Socialists when it cut deep to be a Socialist. The question is, what'll they think about it all?

Edited by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2007. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.