

The January 1901 Special National Convention of the Social Democratic Party of America

by A.S. Edwards ¹
(January 26, 1901)

The special national convention of the Social Democratic Party of America, which opened in Aldine Hall, Chicago, at 10 o'clock Tuesday morning, January 15 [1901], was attended by a larger number of individual delegates than the convention at Indianapolis last March [1st: March 6-9, 1900]. The principal object of the former gathering was the nomination of Presidential candidates; that of the present one to dispose of the question of the consolidation of the socialists of the United States.² For nearly a year, during which the campaign prosecuted a national campaign and found its resources taxed to the utmost in discharging its duty to the cause of socialism, it has found itself harassed by persistent misrepresentations of the attitude of its members toward the question of union with the Rochester faction of the Socialist Labor Party and a few bolters from its own ranks. The officers and members of the party have never been opposed to union os socialists; they have stood almost solidly against the surrender of the Social Democratic Party organization to the control of those who, by methods now familiar to and condemned by the socialists of the country generally, sought its destruction. The convention just held was a complete and splendid vindication of the course pursued by those in temporary control of the party's interests, in local branch and national board, and the inspiring outcome of the four days' deliberations, marked by the truest devotion, tolerance, and comradeship,³ is that the Social Democratic Party is on record not merely for union with a faction which has attempted to destroy it, but for a consolidation of all the organized socialists of the country, whether constituted as national parties or in isolated state and territorial organizations.

The rank and file of the Social Democratic Party in convention assembled — every delegate therein being divested of office and level with every other on common ground and equal terms to do the best thing their united wisdom could devise for socialism — has spoken. What the party could not by fraud and force be coerced into doing, it has, after free

and exhaustive discussion, elected to do, and much more. It stands before the country today, not for a union of two factions, but for a consolidation of all. It is the first proclamation for harmony and a real union, which can be achieved only by the inclusion of all the separate and independent bodies now existing.

Nineteen states were represented by 89 duly accredited delegates, many of whom had to leave for their homes before the vote was reached on the resolutions introduced by Comrade Eugene V. Debs, which constitute the call for a general convention of the Socialist Labor Party, with headquarters at New York; the Social Democratic Party (Rochester faction of the Socialist Labor Party), with headquarters at Springfield, Mass.; the Social Democratic Party, with headquarters at Chicago, and all regular state and territorial parties.

When the convention was called to order Seymour Stedman was elected temporary chairman and Margaret Haile temporary secretary. The delegates immediately settled down to business and the following committees were chosen:

Rules — R.J. Robinson, H. Larson, M. Gillis.

Credentials — C.T.H. Westphal, J. Doerfler, Sylvester Keliher, F.E. Miller, W. Benessi.

Platform — V.L. Berger, G.C. Clemens, F.O. MacCartney, E.V. Debs, G.H. Strobell.

Constitution — Margaret Haile, M. Hallenberg, Alfred Hicks, Seymour Stedman, R. Elsner.

Press — V.L. Berger, A.S. Edwards, I. Ladoff, E.H. Thomas, J. Winnen.

Finance — Edward Zeigler, Theodore Debs, C.F. Meier, J. Doerfler, C.A. Born.

Organization — Seymour Stedman, W.J. McSweeney, E.V. Debs, G.H. Strobell, F.O. macCartney, Margaret Haile, V.L. Berger, M. Gillis, H. Larsen, C.S. Brown, G.C. Clemens, W. Rehfeld, F.A. Lymburner, [William] Croke, C.F. Meier, Alfred Hicks.

Auditing Reports — Philip S. Brown, E.H. Thomas, W. Kerwin, H. Kleist, Edward Zeigler, Charles Tyl.

Resolutions — F. Roderus, M. Gillis, S. Keliher, A. Dennison, F. Mudra, M. Hallenberg, Mrs. Finsterbach.

The temporary chairman was elected for the day and temporary secretary elected permanent secretary for the convention. Sylvester

Keliher was elected assistant secretary. Reports of officers were then read.

From the adjournment of the convention Tuesday evening until the afternoon of Thursday the work of committees absorbed the attention of delegates. The results of their work, with the action thereon, are embodied in the several reports, resolutions, and recommendations herewith submitted to the branch organizations for a referendary vote. Chief among these is the final report of the committee on organization. The resolutions finally adopted by the convention are set forth in the call for a general convention, to be held on the second Tuesday in September at Indianapolis.

There were four propositions before the convention; one, advocated by Comrade Clemens of Kansas, favoring a convention of all socialists who voted a s socialist ticket in the last national election; one, presented from New Jersey by G.H. Strobell, calling for the creation of a National Committee, under which the various organizations now existing would merge; another, presented by Philip S. Brown, embodying the idea of a National Committee within our present organization, and the fourth, a plan proposed by Eugene V. Debs.

<Two garbled sentences here.>

[Through the speeches of] Eugene V. Debs, G.C. Clemens, L.E. Miller, Victory L. Berger, Margaret Haile, Corinne S. Brown, M. Gillis, M. Hallenberg, William Croke, Dr. Carr, W.J. McSweeney, G.H. Strobell, F.O. MacCartney, Edward Zeigler, Alfred Hicks, Sylvester Keliher, C.T.H. Westphal, H. Larsen, E.H. Thomas, A.S. Edwards, and others, the good points contained in each were presented to the convention and for a time there were great differences of opinion among the delegates. The general sentiment, however, favored a convention, and by blending the two plans for the convention a final result was reached, the vote being: For convention: 1,440; against, 1.

Thus did the rank and file of the Social Democratic Party, in the interest of a united movement for socialism, declare for consolidation of all militant socialists in the country.

A communication was read from the Springfield committee and a motion offered to refer the same to the committee on resolutions. To this a substitute was made that it be returned without reply. The motion to refer carried.

National Organization Fund.

At the afternoon session on Wednesday [Jan. 16, 1901], while the majority of delegates were awaiting the reports of committees, some of their number anticipating the report of the finance committee, started a voluntary subscription plan for the purpose of sustaining the work of the national organization. Comrade Corinne S. Brown was in the chair and all the delegates being in good humor, Comrade A.S. Edwards was called upon to begin the work of raising a fund then and there. The enthusiasm ran high and the manner in which the comrades responded with contribution of five, ten, and twenty dollars, pledged to the work of organization for the year, was an eye-opener for those who have been deluded into the belief that the Social Democratic Party was ready for funeral obsequies. The pledges started with contributions by Comrades William Benessi of Kalamazoo, Mich., and M.H. Wefel of Ft. Wayne, Ind., for \$20 each. These were quickly followed by several others for equal amounts. Then several pledges for \$10 were given. Comrade Corinne S. Brown put down her name for \$60 and Dr. A.D. Hill of Chicago for the same — \$5 per month. Comrade Roecker of Wisconsin pledged the Roecker Orchestra and branches at Chilton and Hayton, Wis., for \$20, and Comrade Strobell gave in his name for \$100. In about an hour the grand total was raised to nearly \$800. Elsewhere in this issue of *The Herald* will be found the full list of contributors. It was understood that this money is to be used for the work of organization, under direction of the executive board. The delegates chose as custodians of the fund Corinne S. Brown and Elizabeth H. Thomas, and agreed that the members should be appealed to throughout the country to aid with individual contributions the laudable work thus begun.

Election of Officers.

After the resolutions for a national joint convention were adopted Friday afternoon [Jan. 18, 1901], the convention went into executive session for the election of a new executive board of 11, as provided for in the revised constitution herewith submitted and pursuant to the following resolution:

Resolved, That this convention elect, subject to referendum, eleven members of a National Executive Board; the members of this board shall serve until the election of their successors under the provisions of Article 3 of Section 2 of the constitution.

F.O. MacCartney of Massachusetts was elected chairman of the executive session. The delegates proceeded to nominate candidates for the executive board, all the comrades who were named by the branches through The Herald being placed on the list, as well as some additional ones. A ballot having been taken, first on five resident members of the board, the following were declared elected: Seymour Stedman, Victor L. Berger, Corinne S. Brown, Isador Ladoff, and Frederic Heath. A ballot was then taken for six non-resident members and the following comrades were elected: Louis E. Miller, New York; Margaret Haile, Massachusetts; G.H. Goebel, New Jersey; G.C. Clemens, Kansas; F.A. Lymburner, Iowa, and Alfred Hicks, Colorado.

On motion a committee of three was appointed to draft a resolution expressing the sentiments of the delegates towards Eugene V. Debs and their appreciation of his services to the cause of socialism.

Theodore Debs was then nominated for National Secretary-Treasurer and elected by acclamation.

A.S. Edwards was nominate for editor of the *Social Democratic Herald*. He expressed his desire to step down, but was elected by acclamation.

In accordance with a provision of the call for a joint convention at Indianapolis, the following were elected as a committee to arrange for said convention: Sylvester Keliher, Indianapolis; J.H. Kelley, Marion Ind.; William Croke, Marion, Ind.; Thomas Catton, Indianapolis; M.H. Wefel, Ft. Wayne, Ind.

The following resolution was then read and adopted unanimously with great enthusiasm:

Debs' Services to Socialism.

Resolved, That the Social Democratic Party of America, assembled in national convention, hereby expresses to the socialists of America its high appreciation of the valuable service rendered to the cause of socialism by the untiring energy, the manly eloquence, and the unswerving integrity and high purpose of Eugene V. Debs. During the period since his release from prison as a martyr to the cause of organized labor, he has secured for socialism a favorable hearing before the American people and has done much to obliterate the ignorant attacks upon it, until then so often heard from even educated people and so often seen in even the highest-class magazines. Especially during the late Presidential campaign, through his efforts the

propaganda was carried to many parts of the country where it had been practically unknown, and has been popularized where before it had been ignorantly and viciously opposed. All this he has done without compensation and to the detriment of his private interests; and we heartily pledge him not only our continued appreciation and support, but our genuine, warm, personal affection as well.

Comrade Debs responded in a few brief remarks. He congratulated the delegates on the work of the convention, which he believed had been wisely <missing line or lines> discussion, which was participated in by <missing line or lines> -ization and an unswerving devotion on the part of members, to the end that there might be union in fact among socialists, and the Social Democratic Party become a vital and irresistible force in the battle against capitalism.

The members of the new executive board held a meeting when the convention adjourned and elected Seymour Stedman chairman and Isador Ladoff secretary.

On motion, the headquarters of the party were located at Chicago.

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¹ Although unsigned, this lead article may be reasonably attributed to the editor of the *Social Democratic Herald*, Alfred Shenstone Edwards.

² Actually, according to the convention call, issued Dec. 1, 1900: "The purpose of this convention will be to make such changes in the laws of the party and to make such other provisions as may be deemed necessary to meet the growing demands of the organization."

³ Give or take a fistfight on the floor between two delegates with differing views on the unity question...