
Social Democrats Combine in New National Federation: Pittsburgh Meet Paves Road for Rebirth of Party

[events of May 29-30, 1937]

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PITTSBURGH.— Harmony and hard work marked the national convention which met here on Saturday and Sunday [May 29-30, 1937] and formed the Social Democratic Federation.

Working with an expeditiousness long absent in Socialist gatherings in this country, the convention fully restored the body and soul of American Socialism.

The efficiency of the arrangements made by the Pittsburgh comrades, the unity of purpose displayed by the delegates, and the clarity of thought exhibited by the convention made it, indeed, an historic event.

In Cleveland, a year ago [May 23-26, 1936], the Socialist movement, torn by factional conflict, presented a tragic picture of ruin and impotence. It was reborn in Pittsburgh, the center of the mighty struggle now being waged by hundreds of thousands of workers against the Empire of Steel.

We Stand for Democracy.

Sarah Limbach of Pittsburgh called the convention to order Saturday morning, and Louis Waldman of New York delivered the keynote address. With Algernon Lee of New York as chairman for the day, supported by J. Henry Stump of Pennsylvania and John Shenton of Connecticut as vice-chairmen, the convention quickly got down to work.

Waldman's address struck effectively the keynote of the convention as he reviewed recent events in the Socialist movement and pictured the situation now confronting those seeking to promote the cause of Labor and Socialism.

There was no doubt where the convention stood as it cheered the basic principles enunciated in the keynote address:

"1.— We believe in Democracy. We adhere to democratic principles. We are opposed to dictatorships, whether black or red, whether Fascist or Communist.

"2.— We are Socialists. We believe in a social system based on production for use, not for profit, a system of production and distribution socially owned and democratically controlled in the interests of the people.

"3.— We believe in the attainment of our ends by peaceful, legal means, through political action, through education and propaganda."

This statement of fundamentals, which found more elaborate expression in the Declaration of Principles adopted on Sunday, was the credo to which the Federation dedicated itself.

No Shortcuts for SDF.

In line with immediate needs and objectives, the convention adopted a resolution in favor of widening and improvement of the Social Security Act and the launching by the Federal government of a comprehensive nationwide housing and slum clearance program.

A telegram to Senator Robert F. Wagner called for immediate enactment of an adequate system of health insurance on a nationwide basis.

For Housing Aid.

While approving the Wagner-Steagall housing bill as a good beginning, another resolution urged an appropriation of \$3 billion for the elimination of slums and the building of new homes. The resolution pointed out that private enterprise has failed miserably to meet the housing needs of the people and that the Fed-

eral government was the only agency capable of coping with the problem, in cooperation with state and local governments.

Affirming its determination to fight for extension and strengthening of labor legislation and to cooperate with organized labor in this field, the convention also went on record in favor of the judiciary reform proposals designed to curb the nullifying powers of the Supreme Court and to facilitate social and economic legislation.

Sharing the views of the international Socialist movement, the convention recognized "the value of organized consumer cooperation, side by side with trade unionism and political action, as a means of combatting the evils of capitalism and laying the foundation of a classless society."

LSI Affiliation.

The convention sent fraternal greetings to the Labor and Socialist International, pledging "our continued cooperation in its great task of defending democratic institutions, consolidating the forces of labor, and coordinating the advance of all the peoples of the world toward the establishment of lasting peace, the ending of class rule, and the full realization of the humane ideals of International Socialism."

Ringed resolutions were adopted denouncing Fascism and Nazism and calling also for intensification of the economic boycott against Nazi Germany.

Resolutions pledging support to the Republican government of Spain in its struggle against fascist rebels, aided and abetted by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, were adopted.

To Assist Spain.

"We glory in the brave stand which the Spanish people have taken in defense of popular government, and deem it our duty to assist them in their struggle against the forces of dictatorship," the resolution declared. "We deplore that interpretation of 'neutrality' (by the American and other governments) which results in preventing the shipment of vital supplies to the Spanish government and thus strengthens the arms of those unscrupulous fascist na-

tions which have sent fighting forces to destroy democracy in Spain.”

From James H. Maurer, fighting bravely against severe illness at his home in Reading, Pa., came an inspiring message of faith, to which the convention replied in words worthy of the character and service of that noble veteran.”

The convention sent a greeting also to James Oneal, who had not yet sufficiently recovered to come to Pittsburgh.

Messages of cheer and confidence came also from organizations and individuals from various parts of the country.

The spirit of the convention was well expressed by Mayor Henry J. Stump of Reading [PA].

“We came here,” said Stump, “because we could no longer square our Socialist conscience with remaining in the party which has fallen into the hands of disruptors, of people who do not believe in the idea and ideals of democratic Socialism. I am confident that at this convention we will build an organization that will truly represent these ideas.”

Stump stressed the importance of adapting policy and tactics to the requirements and realities of the American scene.

“The national Socialist Party is dead because it ceased to represent our ideals,” Stump said. “The Social Democratic Federation lives and will live because it has picked up the banner abandoned by those who have led the old party to its destruction. We propose to carry this banner to triumph, and to plant it firmly upon the edifice of the new social order!”

Waldman’s Address.

It was the birth of a new movement that the convention came to record. This was well expressed in Waldman’s address.

“Today,” said Waldman, “the betrayers of Socialist ideals stand hopelessly divided and confused, faction fighting faction. To conceal the bitterness of the struggle and the viciousness of their fratricidal warfare, their ‘all-inclusive party’ meets behind closed doors to conceal from the public the

fact that the Trotsky faction has captured their remaining handful.

“We shall resume the policy which Socialists in years gone by favored of cooperating with all groups which feel as we do, even though they do not as yet see eye to eye with us. They are the progressives inside and outside the trade union movement who appreciate the necessity for independent political action, and who, in many instances, have taken the initiative in creating the basis for such action in their states and localities.

“We welcome, of course, those in the old Socialist Party who may have been temporarily misled by the false issues which were used to becloud the real motives of those who sought to dominate the Socialist Party, but who recognize that there can and will be no compromise with those who smashed the Socialist Party when they found that they could not force their unsocialist position upon it.

“We will continue to regard as enemies those who, no matter how often they have changed their line, which Communists do as often as others change shirts, still cling to the view that dictatorship of a class or a group is the means of bringing about the socialization we favor. We know that none who have been misled by the protestations of their change of tactics have escaped ruination. Their animosity is preferred to their friendship. Theirs can never be anything but the kiss of death.

Cruelty of Fascism.

“We oppose Fascism and Nazism with all our hearts and our strength. We denounce its cruelty, its barbarism, its destructive philosophy and practices. But we cannot consistently oppose fascism and make common cause with those from whom the fascists have copied much of their tactics and technique.

“Our appeal will be to the masses of organized workers. Today, more than in the past, they require a political expression of their own. The measures that have been enacted under the present national administration give government greater power and control over the destinies of the workers, and will influence to a greater extent than was ever the case in the past their activities and their policies.

“It is going to be vital to labor, more than it has ever been, to see that the workers exercise some control over the agencies which are to exercise control over them.

“Machinery will have to be created to give to labor an opportunity for the realization of its aims on the political field. We, here, can do so on a national scale. We owe it to the many thousands of Socialists whom we represent, and countless thousands of others who I know will look to us for leadership and guidance.”

Deploing the rift which now threatens to divide the labor movement in our country into warring factions, Waldman said:

“It arose, in the first instance, on the question of whether there should be an industrial form of organization for the mass production industries.

“Our position on that issue requires no clarification. We have always held to the view that the industrial form of organization is best suited for the organization of the workers in those industries where the employers represent vast aggregations of wealth, and where the economic power they exercise cannot be successfully challenged by a multitude of craft unions, each seeking to represent a small number of workers of a particular craft.

“It would be a grave calamity, however, if differences within the labor movement should be carried to a point where the things we are all most anxious to achieve should be endangered. Regardless of anything that may be said to the contrary, fratricidal strife in the labor movement must be disastrous to everything we hold dear. In the end the only beneficiaries of any real split will be the employers of labor.

“We must exert what influence we possess, and contribute what power we have, to bring about an adjustment of the differences which will restore the unity of the labor movement.”

Sunday’s session was devoted to the expression of these ideas in resolutions, adoption of the Declaration of Principles and the constitution of the SDF, and the election of the NEC.

Among the last-minute actions of the convention was the voting of instructions to the NEC to extend an invitation to Wisconsin to join the SDF.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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