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# Report of the National Secretary of the Socialist Party of America: Delivered to the 1904 Chicago Convention, May 3, 1904.

by William Mailly

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Comrades:—

In submitting this report as National Secretary of the Socialist Party, I shall confine myself to those questions which I have come to consider as essential to the development and progress of the party organization, believing that in the settlement of these questions is bound up the future of the movement in whose interests this convention has been assembled.

The industrial and political situation, presenting new phases from day to day, will continue to give birth to problem which will demand the earnest attention of all Socialists, and our ability to meet these problems and successfully dispose of them will depend more than all else upon the strength and compactness of the organization representing the socialist movement of this country. More than ever socialists must realize that before they can expect to be thought capable of administering and directing the affairs of this or any other nation, they must first prove their fitness for the task by displaying the ability to administer and direct the affairs of a political organization representing the interests of the working class, and it is to this task that I believe their best efforts and most conscientious endeavor should be applied for some time to come. In short, the government of the Socialist Party organization must be the means of fitting its members for the larger duties and greater responsibilities that the future holds for them.

I desire to emphasize, therefore, the necessity of our members giving increased attention to the meth-

ods of transacting the party business in their respective local, state, and national organizations. They must acquaint themselves thoroughly with all the executive and administrative details, such as conducting business meetings and correspondence, keeping accounts, making reports, and other duties involved in the general government of the party. They should post themselves as far as possible upon the detail of party activity in every field and they should elect as their officials and representatives only those comrades whose fitness especially qualifies them for these positions. More important still, they must continue to develop the spirit of self-confidence, of faith in their ability through their own foresight and wisdom to settle all the problems and overcome the difficulties which lie between here and the Cooperative Commonwealth.

Of the writing of books, the making of speeches, and the editing and publishing of papers, there is no end, but there is an appreciable lack of application to the executive branches of our party work. However important the literary and other educational features of the movement may be, yet these factors will continue to be more or less barren of results so long as the party organization is not properly equipped to take full advantage of them. Heretofore (and this was perhaps unavoidable in the early stages of the movement) the greatest amount of energy has been expended upon the dissemination of literature and the holding of public meetings, regardless of the methods employed or of any direct purpose to which the results accruing therefrom were to be applied. There was competition

instead of cooperation, and a consequent waste of energy, money, and enthusiasm. As one result, there is now in this country a tremendous amount of Socialist sentiment of which we cannot take advantage because our organization is not yet in a position to do so. From this time forward we should try to adjust the mechanism of the party to secure the best results with the least expenditure of effort and money, so that the gathering forces of Socialist thought and sentiment can find concrete expression at the ballot box.

Perhaps no other task to which a Socialist can apply himself offers less of individual glory or immediate reward than that of faithful participation in and unremitting devotion to the details of party organization, but this very fact makes it all the more necessary that the task should be undertaken. It is easy and convenient to let things run themselves, but sooner or later the party members pay the penalty for their indifference or carelessness by becoming involved in disagreeable situations which create discouragement and disgust, but which could have been well avoided in the first place. The lecturer or writer will always flourish and receive his proper meed of public reward and admiration. For this reason these positions will naturally be the most coveted, and the persons holding them will continue to have a greater personal influence through their association directly and indirectly with the general membership.

For example, during the past year the number of applications for commissions as national organizers and lecturers has far exceeded the actual number within the ability of the national headquarters to employ at a given time. The comrades filing these applications were in many instances new and inexperienced, but filled with a creditable enthusiasm to be of service to the movement. Several others were from comrades of more experience, but displaying a singular lack of comprehension of the scope and character of the party work. A majority of the applicants desired to be placed at work at once, and some were so insistent that they would brook no delay, and appeared aggrieved when their wishes could not be gratified.

It did not seem to occur to these comrades that, however worthy their motives and ambitions might be, it was quite impossible for the national headquarters to utilize all the available material placed at its disposal. Nor did they seem to realize that there were

other ways through which they could perform valuable service to the movement, ways relatively as important as those sought for, although offering fewer inducements to the enthusiast, but requiring qualities of the highest possible value to the cause of Socialism.

The comrade, however, who assumes the burden of executive and organizing detail must be prepared to accept responsibilities which are comparatively unknown to the worker in other fields. Such a comrade must be possessed of patience with himself and others. He must exercise caution, fortitude, and courage. He must be impersonal and impartial. He must be prepared to accept the will of those for and with whom he works, even at the temporary sacrifice of his own opinions. And, above all, he must expect to be misunderstood and misrepresented by those to whom his services are devoted.

All of this will be difficult and disagreeable and other lines of work will offer greater attractions, but none will bring the immediate and permanent benefit to the Socialist movement faster than this one will. This fact in itself will be the most satisfying and satisfactory reward that can come to any Socialist. If the course indicated has not been followed more generally in the past it is not because the will to serve the movement has been lacking, but because the relative importance of this special phase of the party work has not been recognized. It only requires such recognition to call into action the latent executive ability which now lies dormant in the membership everywhere and upon the development and exercise of which the future success of our movement greatly depends.

This subject has also another phase which should not be overlooked. If the Socialist Party differs from other political organizations, it is in this: that the membership and not a few leaders control and direct the movement. It is this very difference which constitutes its chief strength and must make it unconquerable and triumphant in the future. The organization must be democratic in the true sense of the word or lose its identity as one representing the working class movement to democratize the world. It follows, therefore, that only in the encouragement and development of self-government within the organization can the spirit and practice of democracy be maintained and the movement held to its true course. Embodying as it does the vital principles which make for the liberation

of mankind from all forms of industrial and political despotism, the Socialist Party must announce, through its own actions, democracy as a fact limited only by those restrictions which capitalist conditions impose upon it.

But we should understand that a democratic movement does not imply unrestricted individualism, as some comrades seem to believe. True democracy involves cooperation, and upon our ability to cooperate successfully everything depends. And cooperation in turn involves adaptation to one another; the ability to accept the will of the majority wherever and whenever expressed, as our individual will, until such time as our individual will can be expressed by the majority. And this again in turn involves faith in the movement as an organized force, the exercise of charity toward each other, and the prevalence of the spirit of comradeship throughout the movement.

Nowhere, perhaps, in the capitalist world will it be more difficult to organize a Socialist movement upon purely democratic lines than in this country, where the spirit of individualism has been distorted out of its true proportions until the simplest rules of organization are condemned even by some Socialists as "bureaucratic." These have yet to learn that the purest and highest individualism is that which can subserve itself when occasion requires, to the social will and social good. The real bureaucracy to fear is that which would make a few people the ungoverned and ungovernable authorities and dictators of the movement. There need be no fear of any kind of a bureaucracy so long as the party machinery remains in the hands and under the control of an alert and enlightened membership.

When these self-evident propositions become more generally recognized and accepted by Socialists everywhere there will be fewer locals disbanded after a short and precarious existence, and lapses in membership will become less frequent. It is an encouraging sign that the number of comrades giving their attention to this subject is increasing, and with a still greater consideration we can confidently expect a stronger and more effective organization with which to conduct the struggle with the rapidly combining forces of the capitalist enemy.

### **The National Constitution.**

The present condition of the party organization is generally satisfactory, when the stage of its progress is considered. The form of organization is as yet practically new, and difficulties have been presented as a consequence which, with a revision of the constitution and the development of the organization, should gradually disappear. The present constitution [1901] was a hastily prepared document, and it was natural that it should be faulty in construction, although basically correct.

My ideas upon the character that the organization should take have been expressed elsewhere as follows:

The Socialist Party must be more than a mere political machine; it must be so managed and controlled that the highest degree of democracy consistent with efficiency as the directing force of Socialist activity must be attained. More and more we must provide for a decentralization of authority, and the concentration of the forces of agitation and education. The national headquarters should be the nerve center of Socialist activity, the clearing house through which the different state organizations can be kept in close touch and sympathy with each other, thus ensuring an objective point at which the organized Socialist forces can converge and act unitedly.

The chief problem before us, then, as an organized body, is how to combine democracy in management, efficiency in action, and economy in labor and expense, so that the best and most permanent results can be obtained.

The existing political system requires that state autonomy must necessarily continue to be the basis of organization, but its boundaries and limitations must be more definitely prescribed. There has been a tendency toward exclusiveness, to place the interests of a single state organization above those of the party at large, a tendency as injurious as the other extreme of concentrating authority over the membership in a Central Committee. One carries state autonomy to the extreme and makes toward anarchy; the other denies democracy and makes toward absolutism. Both are dangerous and can only result in dry rot. Our national organization must be fluid enough to invite or encourage neither one nor the other.

Under the present constitution there is danger from both. The national officials may become aware, through the positions they hold, that the officials of a state organization are, unknown to the membership, either neglecting their duties or perverting their powers, to the injury of the party in that state or the entire country, and yet the national officers are powerless to act. Provision should be made for action in such cases, although such action should not be arbitrary or authoritative, but merely along the lines of suggestion, information, or investigation, leaving final action to the membership of the state itself.

On the other hand, there is no constitutional preventative against representatives or members of one state organization interfering with or usurping the duties or rights of other state organizations and their members, or the duties and rights of the national organization in unorganized states and territories. The activities of state officials should be confined to their own states where their responsibility lies, except when agreement is specifically made either with other state organizations or the national organization, as the case may be.

There should also be constitutional regulations to protect the national party against the violation of the principles and platform of the Socialist Party in any organized state or territory.

The qualifications for membership in the party should be made as uniform as possible in all states so that all members may enjoy equal privileges. A system of regulation of transference of membership from one state to another should also be adopted.

In order to avoid the recurrence of having state organizations formed where geographical or other conditions are unfavorable to their effective or permanent existence, the membership in any unorganized state or territory should reach a certain number before the movement for a state organization can be initiated. Eagerness to establish state organizations before conditions were ripe for them has resulted disastrously in several places through failure on the part of these organizations to properly maintain themselves when thrown upon their own resources. The National Office can usually take better care of locals in unorganized states and territories until conditions make a state or territorial organization necessary and justifiable.

#### **The National Committee.**

The present form of the National Committee elected from the various state organizations is objectionable and should be abolished. The principal objection lies in its fostering of factional divisions in the party. The National Committee is supposed to represent the entire party and to act upon matters affecting all the states, while at the same time its individual members are only responsible for their actions to the respective state organizations which elect them, so that the party has absolutely no jurisdiction or control over

any or all of them. Experience has also already shown that it is impossible to devise a basis of representation upon the committee which will permit of equal representation of all the states. The size of the committee makes the method of transacting business cumbersome, exhausting, and expensive.

As a substitute for this I would suggest that there be a National Executive Committee, to consist of 7 or 9 members selected by referendum of the party at large, regardless of section, with each and all members subject to recall. This would give the entire party membership the choice of its administrative body and ensure representation to the locals in unorganized states and territories which have now no voice in the councils of the party, although contributing financially to its support. The National Secretary should be under the direct supervision of the National Executive committee, but elected by referendum of the party membership. The acts of the committee upon all matters referred to it could be published regularly in a bulletin issued for that purpose and furnished to every party member.

#### **The Referendum.**

The initiative and referendum involves a principle too sacred and valuable to be used lightly. Recently two referendums were taken upon the same subject within 30 days of each other, and as a result there are now two contradictory clauses in the present national constitution. The provisions for initiating referendums should be changed to conform to the growth of the organization and propositions should be limited in length. A law should be in force and effect at least 90 days before another law upon the same subject could be initiated and submitted to a referendum.

#### **Organization and Agitation.**

The work done by the national organizers during the past 15 months has been productive of much good and seems to have given general satisfaction. The expense incurred in placing and keeping these organizers in the field has been greater than will probably be the case in the future, as the ground covered by them was mostly new. The financial support given them has been encouraging and gratifying, although

in a number of cases the comrades at various places did not appear to realize the great responsibility borne by the national headquarters for these organizers. The idea seemed to prevail that because the organizers traveled for the national organization there was no need of rendering them any financial assistance. If the National Office had unlimited resources at its command this belief might be warranted, but the contrary is true, so that this word upon the matter may not be amiss.

As the different state organizations develop they will be able to employ their own organizers, and the necessity for national organizers will become lessened. The present method of selecting national organizers and lecturers could be improved upon, however, by the requirement of certain qualifications upon the part of applicants, such as length of party service, special knowledge of Socialism, and the details of organization, etc.

I take the liberty of proposing to the convention the creation of the office of General Organizer. The activities of this official would not be restricted to any section, and his services would be available at all times for the purpose of representing the national organization whenever occasion would require personal investigation and action. There has been need of such an official several times during the past year, and it is my opinion that sooner or later one will have to be selected. The duties of this official would cover a wide field and his work could be of great value to the party.

Propositions will probably be made at this convention for the formation of the foreign-speaking workers into separate federations to be affiliated with the national organization. This is a matter which should receive your careful consideration, as it is necessary that the national party secure the active cooperation of the workers of all nationalities in the movement against capitalism. Whether it would be better to have the federations as proposed, or to have these workers organized direct into locals and branches of the party is a new question which the convention will have to pass upon in some specific manner so that a definite line of action can be pursued.

### **National Lecturers.**

Until recently the condition of the party organization made it impossible to have very much system

in the arranging of tours for party lecturers who had formerly usually traveled at high expense to the locals and often times at great inconvenience and hardship to the speakers themselves. To remedy this I have attempted, in accordance with instructions from the National Committee, to formulate a definite system of lecture work which would enable the party locals to engage capable lecturers at a normal expense, while guaranteeing these lecturers sufficient remuneration for the labor and time expended.

While this work has been fairly successful, yet it has been attended by difficulties only to be appreciated by those in the National Office and into the details of which it is unnecessary to enter here. Some of these difficulties could be obviated by the adoption of definite rules to govern the routing of interstate speakers, which rules would preserve the integrity of the state organizations within their respective boundaries, while also facilitating the general arrangement of engagements with the locals.

This would prevent the confusion and unnecessary expense which have been caused by state organizations assuming the work of routing lecturers and organizers when they were unable, for various reasons, to perform the work properly. The blame for this state of affairs has been mostly directed at the National Office, when the facts are that in almost every case the routing done by the latter has been more satisfactory in every way. With the facilities now in use, speakers and organizers can be routed from the national headquarters much more economically than otherwise. Especially is this true of those states in close proximity to the seat of the national headquarters.

The effort to establish a lecture system such as I have outlined caused the circulation of a report that I was attempting to form what was termed a "bureaucracy" at national headquarters for the purpose of victimizing certain speakers and driving them from the field. I take this opportunity, the first presented to me, to state that this report was entirely unwarranted, that I was not actuated by personal motives of any kind, and that I had no other purpose than the coordination of the party forces upon a scale which would guarantee economy and better results in the future. Regardless of contrary opinions, a system for handling Socialist speakers must be perfected if we are to keep step with the forces which we recognize and proclaim

to be at work in society.

During the infancy of the organized movement when pioneer work was the rule and Socialists were widely scattered and isolated from each other, the question of control of speakers did not arise, except in well-organized sections of the country. But since the party has developed into a national organization the question has arisen and provoked discussion. This is a healthy sign and should be taken as an indication of growth. The question can only be settled in one way, and that way is the one in harmony with the law of organization and coordination. Those who assume to speak for the Socialist Party should be prepared to accept the control of the party. If the Socialist Party is to be held responsible for them, then they should be held responsible to the party; the local workers to the local organizations, the state workers to the state organizations, and the national workers to the national organization. The question of remuneration is a minor one which will gradually adjust itself.

### **Supplies.**

Changes in the form and quality of organizing and other supplies have been made from time to time and a normal price charged in order to bring them within easy reach of all state and local organizations. Various circumstances have prevented us from furnishing locals with sets of books for officials, although the forms for these books have been ready for some time. If ordered in large quantities for cash the books can be secured at a nominal cost, but so far the state of our finances would not warrant the incurrence of this expense. A set of books for State Secretaries has also been devised, and when put into use will go far toward systematizing the work of these officials.

### **Bulletins and Reports.**

The issuance of weekly bulletins and reports chronicling party affairs and activity has proven of such value that steps should be taken to extend the service. It is essential that the membership be fully informed upon the action of the party officials and party affairs in general. The space in the Socialist press is too limited to publish all of this information, which is of more or less importance. I believe a monthly bulletin should

be issued in printed form devoid of editorial matter and devoted entirely to financial, National Committee, and organizers' reports, and other details of an official character. The bulletin could be printed in quantities sufficient to reach every member. This would not prevent the continued issuance to the party press of a weekly bulletin reporting current items of immediate importance.

### **Expensed of Delegates to National Convention.**

I would also suggest that means be provided for the payment direct through the national organization of the expenses of delegates to the national conventions. A general assessment of a nominal sum from each member for this specific purpose and levied before the convention would undoubtedly furnish a sufficient amount to cover these expenses, thus ensuring representation from all the states. The basis of representation could be changed, but a more general attendance would be secured. The adoption of this proposition would place all aspirants for election as delegates in the different states upon the same footing and eliminate the tendency to select delegates because of their ability to defray their own expenses to and from the conventions.

### **The Socialist Press.**

The Socialist party press is gaining steadily in numbers and influence and with its further development will become a most potent factor in shaping the destinies of the movement. Without doubt the general literary and spiritual quality of the press is improving and Socialists are rapidly realizing the urgent necessity for a press that can fittingly represent the Socialist Party. The practice of beginning the publication of local papers before the condition of the movement warrants their continuance has a tendency to detract from the general effectiveness and stability of papers with established circulations, besides making for the dissipation of the limited resources of the comrades. It is much better to increase the usefulness of papers already in the field than to embark upon undertakings which have little certainty of prolonged existence.

The sentiment for an official organ to be published by the national organization may justify me in stating my views in opposition to such a proposition. Past experience in this direction should be ample warning against its adoption. I believe also that the existence of an independent press, free of party control, except in localities where published, is one of the strongest safeguards toward protecting and preserving the party's integrity that we have today. Such a press provides a sure medium for the expression of individual opinion, thus guaranteeing free speech and criticism and preventing the creation of the censorship which has hitherto almost invariably grown out of the placing of official organs in the hands of party officials. In this field, at least, we can afford to have competition, and the survival of the most fit will depend upon the increased knowledge of Socialism and the intellectual development of the Socialists themselves.

#### **Conclusion.**

I have not considered it necessary to repeat what has already been included in my last annual report. A summary of the financial condition of the National Office is herewith appended. If the showing therein made seems unfavorable, the comrades will bear in mind that the expense recently incurred by assisting the party in Colorado and in the Milwaukee municipal campaign has been especially heavy. Economy will be exercised during the next 2 months with the expectation that the national campaign will be entered upon free of debt.

I take pleasure in again expressing my appreciation of the cooperation rendered me in my work as your National Secretary by the assistants in the Na-

tional Office, Comrades W.E. Clark, Charles R. Martin, and James Oneal. They have worked capably and faithfully for the party's interests, and this slight recognition, although inadequate to the proportion of their services, is the least that is due them. I cordially acknowledge also the courtesy rendered toward the National Office by the National Committee and Quorum, the party press, the national organizers and lecturers, and the comrades generally throughout the country.

To you, the delegates to the most representative Socialist convention that has ever met on this continent, I convey my congratulations upon the progress manifested by your presence here today. The further advancement of the Socialist cause in America is conditional upon the character of your deliberations and the actions arising from them. Beginning a new epoch in the movement's history, with the social forces that make for change working in complete harmony with the Socialist philosophy, with the opportunities for hastening the oncoming Social Revolution presenting themselves on every side, we should give to the task assigned us the best thought and devotion of which we are capable, deeming nothing less than that worthy of the cause having for its realization the emancipation of the working class of the world and the ultimate freedom and happiness of all mankind.

Fraternally submitted,

*William Maily,*  
National Secretary.

Chicago, Ill, May 1st, 1904.

***Edited by Tim Davenport.***

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