
Latter Day History:

Important Events and Recent Occurrences in the Socialist Labor Organization of New York City (July 16, 1899)

The regular meeting of the General Committee of Section New York, SLP, had been called, as usual by Organizer L. Abelson, for last Saturday, July 8 [1899], 8 pm, at the Labor Lyceum, 64 East Fourth Street, New York City. It was the first meeting after the semi-annual election of new delegates from all the subdivisions of the city. The members of the section were aware of the fact that a majority of the newly elected delegates were opposed to the then officials of the party and the section, because these officials had overreached themselves and shown that they had no regard for the feeling of solidarity, nor even decency, among proletarians and socialists. The members of the section had been insulted and provoked until their patience was exhausted. The majority had been called “Dutchmen,” “Jews,” “beer swillers,” “sauerkraut-and-limburger-cheese comrades,” and the like, not only at public meetings by DeLeon, Keep, Murphy, and others, but also in the columns of the official organ. They were, of course, indignant, and the late officials knew this well. Having no hopes of saving themselves from swift retribution, they evidently came to the meeting of the General Committee determined to break it up, in order to gain time for organizing some more “fake” and bogus branches, whose “delegates” were destined to form a majority, pliable to the order of DeLeon & Co.

After the uproar had somewhat subsided, Delegate Hillquit arose and moved that before any action is taken the meeting proceed to elect a temporary chairman and that the permanent chairman be elected after the credentials have been reported on.

“I am the temporary chairman,” said Abelson in reply. “If that is the case,” said Hillquit, “let the Committee on Credentials report.” No sooner had he said this than Delegate Keep shouted to him, “Sit down!” Delegate Hillquit paid no attention to this “invitation,” whereupon Delegate Keep jumped up from his seat and, aiming a blow at Hillquit’s face, dealt him a blow to the chest.

Mob Law Proclaimed.

When the meeting had been called to order by Organizer Abelson, he called for nominations for a chairman. Comrades Kuhn and Bock were nominated. The vote was taken by a show of hands. When the vote for Kuhn had been counted, the tellers announced that 32 delegates had voted for Kuhn, the National Secretary of the party.

Organizer Abelson then called upon those desiring to vote for Comrade Bock. Over 50 delegates raised their hands, but no attempt was made to count those voting for Bock, while, disregarding all parliamentary rules and usages of the party, Hugo Vogt tried to interrupt the proceedings by making a "speech." The majority protested vigorously by demanding that their votes be counted. Still, Mr. Vogt insisted upon interrupting the proceedings, and the majority, as well as the minority, were shouting at the top of their voices.

When, at last, order had been restored for a few seconds, Organizer Abelson said that a "motion had been made to permit only those delegates to vote for a chairman who had been delegates before."

No such motion could have been made, at least not in accordance to parliamentary rules, and the majority protested again, considering the Organizer's action to be a clear violation of his duty, which consisted in this case in simply calling the meeting to order, and retire after the election of a chairman.

This act of violence on the part of Keep was the signal for an outburst of passion seldom witnessed in any political meeting, much less in a meeting of socialists. The delegates pummeled each other until blood was seen flowing from many wounds. Men were sprawling upon the floor, others were fighting in corners, upon the tables, chairs and upon the piano, Hugo Vogt having climbed upon the latter yelling and fairly foaming from his mouth. Kuhn, Vogt, Fiebiger, and many others were bleeding, and when they saw that the majority were not willing to submit to mob law, they withdrew from the hall. The majority remained until the hall was closed by the manager of the Labor Lyceum.

Call for a Special Meeting.

Some of the majority delegates who remained at the Labor Lyceum after the regular meeting on Saturday agreed upon signing and publishing the subjoined call for a special meeting:

To the Delegates to the General Committee of Section New York, SLP:

Whereas, the officers and the City Executive Committee of Section New York, SLP, in a most scandalous and dictatorial manner prevented the General Committee from holding its regular meeting;

Whereas, the present critical condition of our section requires speedy and determined action; and

Whereas, The conduct of the Organizer at our last meeting was such as to actually place himself outside of our constitution, for which action he should no longer be entrusted with carrying out the duties of his position; therefore,

We, the undersigned, request the delegates to the General Committee to attend a special meeting of the said committee to be held on Monday, July 10, 8 pm, at Langhut's Hall, 385 Bowery, for the purpose of reorganizing the committee and to take action upon the conduct of our officers, and in regard to the situation in our Section." (Signed by 35 delegates.)

The Special Meeting.

Over 50 delegates to the General Committee met on Monday evening at the appointed hour, at 385 Bowery. The meeting was called to order by Comrade [Julius] Gerber, who explained that the subjoined letter had been sent to Lazarus Abelson, Organizer of Section New York, SLP.

Comrade:—

Whereas, consequent upon the disorderly behavior of some of the section's officers, the regular meeting of the General Committee could not be held, we, regularly elected and duly accredited delegates to the General Committee, resolved to call a special meeting, to be held on Monday, July 10 [1899], 8 pm, at 385 Bowery. We request your attendance, together with the section's books, at the appointed time, that you may call the meeting to order.

(Follow the signatures.)

Organizer Abelson not having made his appearance at 8 pm, Comrade Gerber called for nominations for a chairman pro tem. Comrade Bock was nominated, and, there being no other nominations made, he was elected unanimously. Comrade A. Jablinowski was elected

vice-chairman, and Comrade [Henry] Slobodin was made secretary, while Comrade Partenheimer was chosen as sergeant-at-arms. A Committee on Credentials, consisting of Comrades Nueske, Ehret, and Sieburg, was also elected, and the committee reported that 50 delegates representing 32 subdivisions of the section had presented credentials duly signed and sealed by the regular officers of the said subdivisions.

The delegates having been seated, the temporary officers were elected officers of the special meeting, whereupon the secretary [Slobodin] moved the adoption of the following resolution:

Conspiracy to Precipitate a Riot.

Whereas, A. Keep and H. Vogt continued to disturb and prevent the meeting of the General Committee of Section New York, SLP, which was to take place on July 8, 1899; and

Whereas, The Organizer, Secretary, and other executive officers of Section New York have joined in the conspiracy and aided A. Keep and H. Vogt to disturb the meeting and to finally break it up in a riot; be it

Resolved, That the Organizer, Secretary, and all other officers of Section New York, SLP, be and hereby are suspended from all their respective offices and duties as officers of the section; and be it

Resolved, That temporary successors be elected to fill said offices until the officers of the section are regularly elected; and be it further

Resolved, That this resolution be referred to the general vote of Section New York, SLP.

Delegate [Benjamin] Feigenbaum, who seconded the resolution, pointed out the fact that the officers of the section had trampled upon the constitution and bylaws of the organization and, in a shameless manner, violated their trust. They should have done their utmost to prevent strife and confusion in the party; but instead of doing so they assiduously fomented hatred and showed by their action that their principal purpose was to drive thousands of good socialists from the ranks of the party.

The vote was 40 in favor and 1 against the resolution.

Temporary officers of the section were then elected.

Organizer: Comrade Gerber, by a vote of 38 against 2. Secretary: Comrade Slobodin, by a vote of 39 against 1. Treasurer: Comrade Orland, by a vote of 31. Financial Secretary: comrade Christal, by a vote of 35 against 2. Committees on Credentials and Grievances were likewise elected, as were also members of the City Executive Committee.

Hereupon the following resolution was adopted by a vote of 37 against 2.

State Committee's Willful Neglect.

Whereas, The State Committee of the [New York] State organization of the Socialist Labor Party has willfully neglected to make an effort towards preventing the struggle of factions that rend the sections of the state of New York and endanger the very existence of the organization of the Socialist Labor Party; be it

Resolved, That the officers of the State Committee be and hereby are suspended from all their duties and offices on such committee; and be it further

Resolved, That temporary successors be elected to fill said offices until the state officers are regularly elected.

The following members of the section were then elected to temporarily act as a State Committee until their permanent successors are duly elected: Feigenbaum, Feidner, L. Jablinowski, Schneppe, Christal, Slotkin, and Kirchner.

Usurpers Suspended.

Whereas, Lucien Sanial, Charles H. Matchett, Arthur Keep, A. Brown, Patrick Murphy, and J.J. Kinneally, members of the National Executive Committee, SLP, have precipitated the NEC into a factional struggle among the sections of the SLP and have, instead of directing all their efforts towards maintaining discipline and compactness in the organizations of the SLP, fanned the flame of discord and promoted disintegration; and

Whereas, These members of the NEC have assumed to lay down fundamental principles of socialist economics and declare them binding upon the membership of the SLP, thus encroaching upon prerogatives that belong to the general vote of the party membership or to the National Convention of the SLP; and

Whereas, The said members of the NEC have assumed to pass upon decisions duly rendered by the Board of Appeals of the SLP and decide whether or not they are binding upon the section or sections involved, and refused to enforce decisions of the Board of Appeals, thus usurping prerogatives which belong to the general vote of the

membership of the SLP, as this general vote is the only tribunal to whom the decisions of the Board of Appeals are subordinate; be it

Resolved, That Lucien Sanial, Charles H. Matchett, A. Brown, Arthur Keep, Patrick Murphy, and J.J. Kinneally be and hereby are suspended from all their duties and offices as members of the NEC; and be it

Resolved, That election of members to the NEC as temporary successors in place of such suspended members be held; and be it

Resolved, That the vacancies on the NEC be filled until such election takes place; and be it further

Resolved, That in accord with the Constitution of the SLP this action with the reasons therefore be submitted to the general vote of the party.

The election of members pro tem of the National Executive Committee resulted in the following comrades being elected by a vote of 40: Hillquit, Beranoff, Baker, Wenzel, Kirchner, and Fahl.

Secretary Kuhn's Violation of Trust.

In regard to the conduct of Henry Kuhn, as National Secretary, the following was adopted unanimously:

Whereas, Henry Kuhn, the National Secretary of the Socialist Labor Party, has engaged in the struggle of factions in the party, has devoted his time and energy, which belong to the party, towards promoting the ends of his faction, and has thus neglected his duties as Secretary of the party; be it

Resolved, That Henry Kuhn be and hereby is suspended from all this duties and offices as such Secretary; and be it

Resolved, That election of a temporary successor in place of Henry Kuhn be held; and be it

Resolved, That this action with the reasons therefor be submitted to the general vote of the party.

The vote for National Secretary gave Comrade Slobodin 29, Comrade [Naum I.] Stone 7 votes, and Comrade Henry Slobodin was declared elected.

"Fake" Branches.

Upon motion the newly elected Organizer [Gerber] was instructed to prefer charges against all such members of the section who have been engaged in trying to “organize” “fake” branches, for the purpose of creating a majority in favor of the deposed officers, it having been shown to the satisfaction of the delegates that, by their arbitrary and reckless action the deposed officers had brought about a veritable reign of terror in the city of New York for all socialists who dared to show that they would not tamely submit to the dictates of men chosen to act as the representatives of the party for the purpose of spreading the principles of socialism among the laboring masses of this city, state, and nation!

Cheers for the SLP.

The meeting closed with three cheers for the Socialist Labor Party, after the members of the temporary National Executive Committee had been instructed to prepare a manifesto to be issued to the party at large.

The meeting having adjourned, the different committees went to work immediately to carry out their instructions. The National Secretary pro tem [Slobodin] was charged with the duty of taking possession of the party’s property at National Headquarters, 184 William Street, New York City.

More Rioting.

When Comrade Slobodin, bearing credentials from the National Executive Committee pro tem appeared at the general office, he found the doors locked, Henry Kuhn, Hugo Vogt, Daniel DeLeon, L. Abelson, Patrick Murphy, and others being inside. they refused to open the doors, and when one of the doors had been opened, Comrade Slobodin and other delegates, who were accompanying him, were attacked with clubs, beer and whiskey bottles, and other weapons.

Comrade Slobodin and his companions, being beaten, defended themselves to the best of their ability, when some of the DeLeon-Kuhn faction ran down the street calling a number of police officers to “protect” the deposed National Secretary.

The police immediately proceeded to clear the place, leaving there only DeLeon, Vogt, Kuhn, and Abelson, who declared that they paid rent for the place and that they could be removed from there only through proceedings in court. All night the four remained in the office guarded by

police. In the morning, still under the protection of the police, they carted away to a newly rented place not only the property of the party, to which they had no right as deposed officials, but also that of the Socialist Cooperative Publishing Association, such as desks, tables, chairs, files, another articles belonging to an office for which the party has never paid a cent. The police were lavishly rewarded for their “protection” by the ex-officials in the shape of beer, whiskey, and cigars to which they have been treated all morning.

The riot at the Secretary’s office created a sensation in the neighborhood, a large number of people assembling in the street, and commenting upon the beautiful exhibition of socialist solidarity and proletarian unity.

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