
**The Union Conference:
Minutes and Commentary**
by Margaret Haile
(March 25-27, 1900)

The Committees of Nine, on union, elected by the SDP and the SLP conventions, respectively, met at the Labor Lyceum, New York, on Sunday Morning, March 25, 1900.

There were present, of the SLP Committee: Harriman and Benham, California; Hillquit, Stone, and Sieverman, New York; Hayes, Ohio; White, Connecticut; Fenner, Massachusetts, and Barnes, Pennsylvania.

Of the SDP Committee there were present: Heath, Wisconsin; Stedman, Illinois; Chase, Carey, and Haile, Massachusetts; Lonergan, Connecticut; Hoehn, Missouri, and Butscher, New York. Berger of Wisconsin was absent.

Harriman was elected chairman and Chase vice-chairman of the conference. N.I. Stone was elected secretary of the SLP Committee and Margaret Haile of the SDP Committee, to act jointly as secretary of the conference.

A Press Committee was elected, consisting of Benham and Heath, to be subject to the orders of the conference.

It was voted to take up the following questions in their order: (1) Party name; (2) Constitution; (3) Press; (4) Candidates; (5) Platform.

Voted that unless a party division is called for by one or more members, the committee vote as one body.

It was voted to discuss all of the points in the order already adopted, before a vote is taken — each proposition to come up as a separate vote, after all had been discussed.

A motion, by Hillquit, that all minority reports should be avoided where there is division on party lines, and in all other cases only one recommendation under each head should be submitted, was lost. The SDP Committee decided that while they hoped for unanimous report, they recognized the right of every member of their committee to present a minority report if he saw fit.

Adjourned at 1 o'clock to meet at 2.

The afternoon session opened on the question of party name. Discussion continued until 7 pm, every member of the SLP Committee arguing against the name SDP and favoring the name United Socialist Party; with the exception of Max Hayes, who was not present during this discussion; while the Social Democrats urged the adoption of the name SDP. Neither side seemed able to convince the other, and the session adjourned, to take up the question in separate committee during the evening, with the hope of arriving at some basis of action to be submitted next morning.

• • • • •

The Monday morning session [March 26] opened with a report by Chase on behalf of the Social Democrats, that the latter had decided to recommend that two names should be submitted to general vote — the name SDP as the choice of the SDP Committee, and one other name to be selected by the SLP Committee. The latter thereupon recommended the submission of the name “United Socialist Party” as their choice.

The location of the seat of the National Executive Board was next taken up. Several nominations were made in joint session, viz., New York, Chicago, New Haven, Cleveland, Springfield, Mass., and Boston. After party consultation, the SDP delegates reported they would recommend the submission of three names: Chicago, New York, and Springfield. The SLP delegates thereupon reported their willingness to submit only Springfield, provided the SDP would agree to do the same. The latter, after again withdrawing for consultation, reported that five of their number were in favor of agreeing to this proposition, but that two would submit a minority report in favor of Chicago. The minority were Seymour Stedman and Margaret Haile. It was moved by Sieverman and seconded by Stone that no minority reports be permitted except by permission of a majority of either committee.

It was therefore resolved that Springfield, Massachusetts, be recommended as the seat of the National Executive Board until the next national convention. On this point a minority report will be submitted recommending Chicago.

On the question of the composition and manner of electing the National Executive Board, a motion was made by the SLP to have a provisional NEC consisting of ten members, five from each party, two to be selected from New York, two from Massachusetts, and one from Connecticut, respectively, by each party.

Stedman moved a substitute, providing for a National Council to be composed of one member elected by each state, which should meet in council at least once a year and consider the interests and the needs of the movement in every part of the country; and should nominate candidates for a National Executive Committee of nine members, who should be elected by referendum. Members of the National Council to be subject to recall by the membership of their respective states, and members of the NEC to be subject to recall by the membership at large.

A roll call showed eight SLPs in favor of the former (the Eastern) plan, and two Social Democrats. Hoehn, Butscher, Lonergan, Stedman, and Haile favored the National Council plan. It was decided to bring in a minority report on this point also.

Adjourned to 7:30 pm.

• • • • •

Tuesday morning's session [March 27] opened with nomination of candidates for provisional National Executive Board. Five candidates are to be elected by each party, and it was decided that each committee should nominate ten names, in order to give the party membership a choice.

The SDP nominees were:

From New York — Butscher, Phillips, Gordon, and Guier.

From Massachusetts — Chase, MacCartney, Jones of Springfield, and Haile.

From Connecticut — W.P. Lonergan of Rockville and George Sweetland of Bristol.

The SLP nominees were:

From New York — Sieverman of Rochester, Slobodin, Hillquit,, and Stone of New York.

From Massachusetts — Fenner of Worcester, Wrenn of Springfield, Oliver and Kaplan of Boston.

From Connecticut — White and Bartels of New Haven.

As to a permanent National Executive Board, it was moved by the SLP that until the 1st of February, 1901, the affairs of the united parties should be conducted by the provisional committee, and that from and after that date the same committee should be continued as the permanent NEC — any state so desiring to have the right to send an additional member at its own expense.

At this point Seymour Stedman renewed his motion for a NEC to be nominated by a National Council consisting of one member from each state, and elected by referendum. This time his motion carried, and that point was removed from the minority report.

The vote on this question, by roll call, showed SDP — 6 to 1 in favor, and SLP 5 to 3.¹

As a method of providing for their successors, it was voted that during the month of January in each year the members in the respective states shall elect their respective members of the National Council.

On motion of Chase, the matter of Presidential candidates was taken up and promptly disposed of, Eugene V. Debs for President and Job Harriman for Vice-President being the unanimous choice.

The platform question was settled, without discussion, by the unanimous adoption of the SLP declaration of principles, with the addition of the SDP demands.

It was decided to recommend that the two parties unite upon Eugene Dietzgen, the nominee of the SDP, for delegate to the International Convention at Paris in 1900.

The constitution was next taken up, and the best points in each constitution adopted as far as practicable. But the time was so limited and the points of difference so numerous that the result could not be expected to be entirely satisfactory. Much more is this true of the important and difficult question of the party press.

Benham offered a motion that “each member of the party shall designate which paper of a list to be furnished by the NEC such member desires, and that each paper so ordered shall be paid for at the rate of 10 cents per quarter by the NEC; this plan to take effect upon the consummation of union.

Harriman moved an amendment that on account of the different basis upon which the *SD Herald* was maintained, that paper to be sent to members of the party on the 12-cents-per-quarter arrangement for the first six months, and that the scheme proposed by Comrade Benham be thereafter applied. At this point the conference adjourned for supper, and when it reconvened the latter amendment was withdrawn.

There were amendments and substitutes galore and a lot of unintelligible discussion. Carey had a plan for utilizing both *The People* and the *SD Herald* as official papers, one to be devoted more particularly to party news, discussions, etc., and the other to general propaganda work, but it met with no favor. The plan that was finally agreed to was a modification of a substitute offered by Hillquit, that the *SD Herald* may

be sent to all the present members of the SDP and to such new members of the united parties as may select it, for six months after the consummation of the union, the NEC to pay for the same to the amount of \$60 per week. At the expiration of the six months all the papers are to be put on the same basis; each member to select which one he pleases, and to have it paid for by the NEC out of his dues to that body, at the rate of 10 cents per quarter.

It was voted that the members of both parties in Chicago should select a National Campaign Committee to serve during the coming national campaign.

The question of party name, the conference decided to submit in the following shape:

(1) Are you in favor of the name Social Democratic Party?

(2) Are you in favor of the name United Socialist Party?

(Vote for one only.)

(3) In case the party name voted for by you fails to obtain the concurrent majority of both parties, shall the name receive the majority of the total vote of both parties be adopted?

(Vote yes or no.)

On the question of referendum it was voted that a committee of two, consisting of one from each party, be elected to receive the votes of the various sections and branches from the secretaries of both parties, who shall first count and note the number of votes, and to publish a detailed account of the votes cast by each section and branch in the *SD Herald* and *The People*. The votes of those only who are in good standing on April 1st and present at the meeting to be counted. Butscher and Stone were elected such committee.

The two secretaries, N.I. Stone and Margaret Haile, together with William Butscher, of Brooklyn, were instructed to put the proceedings of the conference into shape and prepare them for referendum vote, to be submitted not later than April 15th; all votes to be in the hands of the respective National Secretaries by May 30th.

At 11:20 pm, Tuesday, I left the hall, in order to catch the midnight train for Boston, leaving Comrades Hoehn, Butscher, and Carey, together with the entire SLP Committee, to arrange a few remaining details of the constitution.

[Additional comment by conference secretary Margaret Haile.]

Comrade Social Democrats:—

(My pen lingers over the name as I write it. It has grown to mean more to me within the past six weeks than it ever did before!)

In submitting the above report I want to say that in the seven years of my work in the socialist movement I have served on innumerable committees, of more or less importance, and never in all my experience have I had to make a report of results which were so unsatisfactory to me. A work of such magnitude and complexity as the unification of two distinct and self-conscious organizations should never have been crowded into the short space of three days. It was utterly impossible to do justice to each important issue. Some trivial matters received more than their just share of time and attention, while other very important matters had to be rushed through without proper consideration. I refer ore particularly now to the question of the party press. Though it was one of the most difficult and knottiest of all the problems before us, it was left to the last evening, coming up under the head of constitution. During the latter and most decisive part of the discussion only five Social Democrats were present, viz., Stedman, Hoehn, Carey, Butscher, and myself. The others had gone home. The full committee of the SLP was present to the last minute. The decision was arrived at about 11 o'clock, and I had to take my train at 12 for Boston. Comrade Stedman had also to leave at 12 for Washington.

We had been hard at work for three exciting days, under the most intense nervous strain, and were tired out, mentally and physically. Nevertheless, "the remnant that survived" put up the best fight it could, firmly believing that a national organ which goes into the hands of every member of the party is necessary for the solidarity of the party, and as well as to guarantee to the party a mouthpiece under all possible exigencies. We favored the plan proposed by Comrade Carey of retaining both *The People* and *The Herald*, the one to be devoted more particularly to party matters, and the other making a specialty of general propaganda, or of scientific socialism put into popular form. But that plan was not considered for a moment by our SLP conferees.

When we finally submitted to the plan adopted, I, for one, did so with the strongest kind of conviction that it would not be acceptable to our membership, and probably not to the majority of the SLP either. I believe I know the intelligence and good sense of our Social Democrats sufficiently well to predict that the plan submitted will be voted down,

and that another and more generally satisfactory, and more workable, plan will have to be devised. I am frank to confess that I think we made an awful botch of the party press question, and we deserve to be forced to get to work and formulate a better one.

Again, in regard to the location of the national headquarters at Springfield, Massachusetts, I was not at all in accord with the other members of our committee. In the first place, I do not believe in submitting only one name, and saying to our members, "You must choose Springfield, or nothing." I want that the members shall at least have a chance to say whether they wish to have the headquarters removed from Chicago. This line of action on other matters forced me to say, at the conference, that I believed our constituents had some rights which even this joint committee was bound to respect, and one of the SLP members took issue with me and scouted the idea, saying that our constituents had not entered into the consideration before, and it was rather late in the day to bring them up now; all of which may have been the case with them, but certainly was not with some of our committee. I had never heard any Social Democrat express dissatisfaction with Chicago as the party's headquarters, nor with the way the affairs of the national party have been conducted. On the contrary, I had heard nothing but commendation and satisfaction with the wonderful progress of our party in its short existence of 18 months, and the energy and ability of our national officers, who have succeeded, with precious little help from the East, in getting organized in 32 different states already; and I could see no reason why any committee, joint or otherwise, should take it upon itself to say, without giving the members any choice in the matter, "The national headquarters of this movement must be removed from Chicago. They must be established in Springfield. You have no other choice."

And this is the reason, comrades, why I, for one, desired to put in a minority report recommending Chicago, so that you might at least have a voice in the location of our national headquarters.

As to the reasons why the headquarters of a great national movement should be located somewhere near the center of the field which it is to cover, I shall have something to say at another time.

Harmony in the report of the conference is desirable — but we gave the two parties a choice in the matter of name. Why should you not also have a choice as to the location of the national headquarters?

Margaret Haile,
Boston, Mass.

Published in *Social Democratic Herald*, vol. 2, no. 42, whole no. 92 (April 7, 1900), pg. 2.

¹ This concept of a National Council was not alien to the SLP dissidents; a substantially similar proposal had been advanced in a party referendum in the fall of 1895 by sections seeking a countervailing force to the New York City NEC dominated by National Secretary Henry Kuhn and party editor Daniel DeLeon.