

Socialists Unite!

Committees of the SLP and SDP Hold a Second Conference and Adopt Plans to Further Union (May 20, 1900)

The committees on union of the Social Democratic and Socialist Labor parties met in joint conference at 64 E Fourth Street, New York City, on Sunday morning May 20 [1900]. At the opening of the conference there were present from the Social Democratic Party Comrades William Butscher, Seymour Stedman, Victor L. Berger, Margaret Haile, W.P. Lonergan, John C. Chase, James F. Carey, and G.A. Hoehn. Comrade Eugene V. Debs was present by invitation. From the Socialist Labor Party, Comrades N.I. Stone, Job Harriman, Max S. Hayes, M. Hillquit, Charles Fenner, W.E. White, and Frank Sieverman. Comrade J. Mahlon Barnes arrived later in the day. A large crowd of interested spectators was present throughout the proceedings.

The conference was called to order by Comrade Chase, who stated that in view of the situation existing in the movement the conference of the two committees on union was called to consider what best should be done. Comrade Chase was elected chairman of the meeting. Comrade Stedman stated that he and those for whom he spoke did not recognize the meeting as a legal one, as the vote against union registered by the Social Democratic Party had discharged the committee and such a committee no longer existed. He requested that a separate conference of the Social Democratic members of the "former committee" be held to try to have them arrive at an understanding.

Comrade Carey said that for his part he recognized the conference as entirely legal, the committees on union being the highest constituted authority in the socialist movement. He did not favor a secret conference of the Social Democratic members of the committee. Whatever he had to say could be said right there before the world and he moved that the Social Democratic members hold a conference immediately in this room.

Comrade Stedman disputed the right to put a motion of that kind and gave warning that his side would not recognize it.

The motion was put and was adopted. Comrades Stedman, Haile, Berger, and Lonergan withdrew and were later on followed by Comrades Carey, Hoehn, Chase and Butcher.

The Social Democratic members of the committee then held a meeting in another room upstairs. A large number of members of the party was present.

Comrade Stedman suggested as this was an informal conference that Comrade Eugene V. Debs act as chairman. Comrade Debs said he preferred not to serve, as he would probably take part in the discussion that would follow.

A dispute here arose as to whether this was a meeting of the Social Democratic committee on union or only an informal conference of individual members of the party. Comrades Stedman and Berber maintained that the Social Democratic committee no longer existed and that the vote against union submitted upon the manifesto of the NEB had discharged the committee.

Comrade Carey moved that this meeting be one of the Social Democratic committee on union elected by the Indianapolis convention and that Comrade E.V. Debs be given the privilege of the floor to take part. The motion was carried on a vote of 5 to 3, Comrades Chase, Carey, Butscher, Hoehn and Lonergan voting ayes and Comrades Haile, Stedman, and Berger voting no. The latter stated they would not recognize the meeting as one of the committee on union, but only of individual members of the former committee.

Comrade Chase was then elected chairman by a vote of 5 to 3.

A long discussion ensued upon the question of union, Comrades Butscher, Chase, Carey, and Hoehn speaking for union and Comrades Stedman, Berger, Haile, and Debs against union, but in favor of "political cooperation." After several hours debate Comrade Butscher moved that this committee on union elected by the Indianapolis convention adjourn to meet the committee on union of the Socialist Labor Party, in order to proceed with the negotiations for union.

Comrades Berger and Stedman disputed the right to entertain such a motion, which was adopted by a vote of 5 to 3. The meeting then adjourned.

At 2:30 the joint committees of the two parties met again. Comrades Haile, Berger, Stedman, and Debs were not present but arrived later. Comrade Stedman stated that those opposed to union still refused to recognize the conference as legal, and that they came as individuals

willing to meet the members of the former committee as individuals in order to consider "political cooperation."

Comrade Harriman asked who empowered them to enter into negotiations for "political cooperation" as individuals. What difference was there in meeting the members of the committees as individuals or individuals as members of the committee? By whose authority did they come with an offer of "political cooperation?" For whom did they speak and what binding effect would such negotiations have upon anybody?

Comrade Hillquit rejected the offer of "political cooperation." He considered it an insult to the Socialist Labor Party to tell them they were not fit to unite with, but that they were fit to politically cooperate with. The committee of the Socialist Labor Party was instructed for union and nothing less would do. The committee of the Social Democratic Party was instructed for union, not political cooperation.

Comrade Sieverman spoke in the same strain.

Comrade Carey moved that this joint committee proceed with the negotiations for union and those members dissenting be invited to remain and participate.

The motion was adopted. Comrade Stedman said under the circumstances those opposed to union would withdraw and consult. Comrades Stedman, Berger, Haile, and Debs withdrew. A few minutes later Comrade Stedman announced that they would no longer remain and participate in any proceedings.

The joint committee then proceeded with business. It was decided that the members of both parties be called upon to register their votes upon the report previously submitted by the joint committee and that the votes be sent to the secretaries of the joint committees, Comrades N.I. Stone and William Butscher. The time for voting was extended to June 25.

An amendment was added to the report empowering the provisional committee to be elected to authorize a change in the party names in any state where the state organization might desire a change when necessary to avoid legal or other complications. The provisional commission was also empowered to fill vacancies if such should occur.

The joint committee then adjourned.