
The Chicago Convention: National Socialist Party Convention Held at Chicago, Ill., May 1-6, 1904: Official Report of H.F. Titus, Delegate-at-Large from State of Washington.

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To the Socialist Party of the State of Washington.

Comrades:—

As your Delegate-at-Large to the National Convention of our party, held at Chicago, May 1-6 [1904], I herewith submit a report of my actions at such convention:

The first work assigned me was to act as a member of the Committee on Credentials. Aside from the routine work of this committee, there were 3 important disputed cases. The first was that of [A.T.] Gridley of Indiana, who had held for nearly 20 years the office of city engineer in Aurora, a small city in his state. On this case I presented a minority report, since the majority report recommended his admission in view of the fact that no definite party law existed for such cases. My recommendation was that he be seated only on the explicit understanding that his appointment was for merit only and had no political significance, thus establishing a party precedent in harmony with the repeated vote of the party in the state of Washington. This minority report was adopted by the convention.

The second disputed case was that of J. Stitt

Wilson of California. It was alleged that he had sent a congratulatory telegram to Mayor Jones, of Toledo, on the occasion of his election as mayor. Comrade Wilson, in reply to questions by me, expressly disowned having authorized the sending of that telegram, which was sent without his knowledge of its contents by his friend, Mr. Nelson, though he also said he believed Mr. Nelson would say he was authorized by Wilson.

But in the absence of Nelson and on Wilson's explicit disavowal, I voted for his admission as a delegate.

The third case in question was that of [Charles] Randall of Utah. The consideration of this case occupied the most of two sessions. Randall, who represented the Utah organization which has been promoted chiefly by Joseph Gilbert, formerly of this state, was ably

seconded by Walter Thomas Mills. A large number of sympathizers, like J. Stitt Wilson and [N.A.] Richardson of California and [R.A.] Southworth of Colorado, filled the committee room while this case was before the committee. The facts as developed in the hearing



showed that the old [Utah] organization, of which Gilbert was a member, had refused to pay dues to the National Office and that consequently its state charter had finally been revoked by the National Committee. Then they held in Salt Lake City a State Convention, in which many “unattached Socialists” participated. This convention resolved to offer the National Convention the back dues, some \$86, on condition that the action revoking the charter be rescinded and their delegate seated; in case the national organization refused this offer, this Utah organization would “go it alone.” I drew repeated attention to the fact that the hearing before the committee was one-sided, the 6 Locals in Utah affiliated directly with the National Office having no testimony there to meet that of Randall and Mills, and that our Washington State [National] Committeeman, [George] Boomer, who was again and again attacked, was not present to speak for himself. Under these circumstances, the committee finally voted “not to seat the applicant as a delegate but to allow him the courtesy of the floor without voice or vote.” Delegate Mills, of Kansas, gave notice when this case was reported to the contention that he would call it up later, but he never did.

My next important task was to serve as a member of the Platform Committee. We held sessions for some 4 days, and the most searching discussions occurred in that time. Each one of the committee of 9 freely told what he thought should be embodied in the platform. The older platforms, such as the Rochester, the Indianapolis, the Erfurt, were thoroughly gone over. [Henry] Slobodin, of New York, presented an excellent outline drawn after the above models. After all suggestions were made, [George] Herron, of New York, was delegated to embody the sense of the committee. Again, after he presented his draft, the document was gone over word by word and subjected to changes voted on by the entire committee. [Eugene] Debs and [Ben] Hanford and [Victor] Berger were particularly careful to weigh each phrase. My own part was to urge greater brevity and terseness and the original draft was cut down about 1/3. I also pointed out that this platform contains no statement of the exact manner in which the working class is exploited in the payment of wages, that is, the Marxian discovery of what is known as “surplus value.” But I was obliged to admit that this does not appear in any of the standard international

Socialist platforms and I was not prepared to insist on the introduction into our platform of matter that the Socialists of the world have not yet seen fit to introduce. As finally adopted, the Chicago platform contains all that any previous platform contained — and more.

Aside from my committee work, I took part in several debates on the floor of the convention which will appear when the verbatim report of the convention appears. I may say that I advocated and voted for the adoption of the Trade Union Resolution, which declared it the duty of every wage worker to join the Union movement and which also declares for Trade Union neutrality on the subject of politics. I also supported and voted for “The Program,” which lays down certain suggestions for Socialist officials elected under capitalism and which takes the place of the dubious “Immediate Demands.”

On two points I found myself voting with the minority. I strongly opposed the payment of \$1500 a year to our National Secretary, as a tendency in the same direction as that shown in the labor unions which give big salaries to their “fakir” leaders. I urged that our dues are paid by workingmen on small wages and that we must economize in every possible way. I advocated an increase from the present salary of \$1,000 to \$1,200 to meet the increased cost of living in Chicago, but this amendment was voted down. In line with this action, I also opposed the sending, at our expense, of 3 delegates to the International Congress and advocated 1 delegate only. This carried. The second instance in which I advocated a measure which was defeated was the motion to submit the constitution to referendum by sections instead of as a whole. It was urged by those who favored submission as a whole, that the membership might vote down some sections which were vital to the whole instrument, whose absence would cripple the constitution itself. I replied to this that they assumed the stupidity of the membership and that we must never distrust the rank and file, in whose control alone rests the safety of our movement; and that we must resist any disposition to centralize power or to run the party from the top down instead of from the bottom up. The refusal of the convention to submit the platform at all amazed me, and I can only account for it on the theory of temporary aberration of mind. It occurred in the last hour of the

convention when all the comrades were tired and when nearly half had gone home. I freely said and still maintain that the platform adopted at Indianapolis and confirmed by referendum of the party, remains our national platform until another is adopted by the party membership itself. I have urged Locals all over the country to send in demands for the submission to party referendum of 3 things: (1) The Chicago platform; (2) The Chicago constitution, by sections; (3) The Chicago resolutions. Probably a fourth should be added, namely, that \$1,200 should be substituted for \$1,500 in the section relating to National Secretary's salary. Five locals in 3 different states can compel the submission of these questions. The call should be immediate to save time and to get the new constitution into execution as soon as possible. I have no doubt that a sufficient number of calls are already in the hands of the National Secretary, but the more calls the better.

I also had the pleasure and the honor of making the nominating speech which placed Ben Hanford, of New York, before the convention as candidate for the Vice Presidency. I urged that no one but a wage worker should be thought of for a place on the ticket, as a true exponent of a party which had now first come to self-consciousness as a working class party. The nomination received many seconds and Hanford was selected unanimously.

I have made this circumstantial narration of my acts as your representative because you have a right to know whether you have been truly represented. Standing as I did for so many delegates whom we could not send because of our poverty, though we were entitled to them, I felt a heavy burden of responsibility and I trust I have met your expectations and fulfilled your will. At any rate, I did the best I knew.

Yours Fraternaly,

Hermon F. Titus.

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