

Socialist Split Leaves Issues Still Unsettled

Leftward Movement Halted by Compromises Used To Oust Old Guard; McLevy and Hoan Held New Dominant Right-Wing In Party

By JAY LOVESTONE

Nothing of a substantial political character, no serious political difference, was settled at the Cleveland convention of the Socialist Party. Organizationally, there was achieved a change thru the New York Old Guard "taking a walk" and the Militants consequently remaining the undisputed organization of the Socialist Party in the Empire State.

The deliberations and proceedings of the convention do however reflect an accentuation of some trends. In the main these are the following:

(1) The Militants headed by Mayor Hoan and Norman Thomas have squeezed out the New York Old Guard and taken over their organization posts and power.

(2) This job was performed not thru any political defeat inflicted on the New York Old Guard, not thru any sharp differentiation of policy and principle. On the contrary, it was achieved thru a series of caucus deals, convention trades, organization arrangements—all at the expense of leftward policy and revolutionary socialist principles. In fact, the Thomas faction in the national Militant pow-wow not only took away some organization posts from the N. Y. Old Guard, but also took over some political positions from the extreme right wing headed by Waldman. There is no doubt that it was only by doing the latter, only by allowing the political line of the S.P. to be dictated by such dyed-in-the-wool Rights as Hoan and Hoopes, that the Thomas Militants were able to register their organizational victory over Waldman and Company.

(3) The crisis in the Socialist Party is very far from being at an end; it is merely entering a new phase. Before this convention, the entire Right wing of the Party was inside; today one part is outside (Waldman) and another part, the bigger section and the one better rooted in the soil of the country (Milwaukee-Reading-Montana), is still inside. The latter exercises a greater ideological weight on the party policies than even before be-

cause the new leadership is dead scared lest there be another group taking a walk and thus there be dealt a mortal blow to the campaign aspirations of the S.P.

(4) It is for this reason primarily that the Cleveland convention resolutions indicate a turn to the right—a turn in force for some time but only accentuated by the fortunes of faction war as shared or denied at the convention. An examination of the decisions of the convention in regard to such basic questions as the road to power, the united front, the farmer-labor party ticket in 1936, work inside the trade unions, nature of the party organization itself, attitude towards imperialist war proves this to be the case.

(5) Never before was the Militant caucus so heterogeneous ideologically. Politically, it is a sort of Noah's Ark. It would appear that the guard at the entrance to this Ark was particularly lenient. Reflecting the "all-inclusive party" conception of Comrades Thomas and Felix, the Militant caucus now has within its ranks such outright reformists as Dan Hoan who has led his Wisconsin S.P. membership into the LaFollette Progressive Federation on an individual membership basis, some cynical infantile forces scattered in N. Y., some confused but well-meaning comrades eager to learn and fight and anxious to move leftward, some ultra-leftist sectarians who have drunk at the cesspool of Trotskyism, some very valuable worth-

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while revolutionary socialist forces who are hogtied by the conflicts and cross currents, and, finally, some centrists who are experts in dressing and perfuming right wing doctrines with left phrases—often ultra-left.

This situation was painfully revealed in the debate over the resolution dealing with the question of a farmer labor-party. Such Old Guardists as Toole of Maryland, such Right Wingers as Jasper MacLevy of Connecticut joined hands with the leftist sectarians of Minnesota (Trotskyites) to battle against the Labor Party. The ideological level of this debate was not very gratifying. Thomas and Hoan finally carried the day and passed a resolution putting the S.P. on record for a Farmer-Labor Party by a vote of 109-64. Some Right Wingers from the Massachusetts delegation abstained from voting. There is good reason to believe that if Thomas and the New York Militants had not made some eleventh hour serious concessions in principle—by deleting the whole question as to the relation of the labor party to the problem or the seizure of power—the resolution would have had even a closer call and might even have become the basis for a serious crack-up at the convention. That we are justified in our evaluation will become clear when we examine the Farmer-Labor Party resolution adopted.

The ideological heterogeneity prevailing at the convention and gripping the party was rather

crudely disclosed in the content of the election platform adopted. It smacks of pacifism, parliamentary cretinism, revolutionary aspirations, militant inspirations, technocracy and the Commonwealth Plan.

Of a similar hodge-podge character is the resolution on the war question.

Indicative of the desperate efforts made by Comrade Thomas and the New York Militants to capture the party posts and yet preserve the maximum amount of party unity is the nature of the revision of the Declaration of Principles—in the direction of less clarity and more confusion, in the way of blurring its original vague and contradictory content so that Dan Hoan and Hoopes and their like could accept it without any reservation or question. In this light it is interesting to note that Dan Hoan, while making one of his many pleas to the convention for harmony and calmness, stressed that at the Detroit convention the Declaration of Principles was adopted in an atmosphere of hysteria. He welcomed the opportunity to consider it anew and "improve" it in a different atmosphere. The new Declaration of Principles accepts the right wing's distorted conception of the theory of the historical inevitability of armed insurrection and on this basis repudiates it as a doctrine, belief in which is incompatible with membership. It is obvious that by such artful dodging no clarity is arrived at and that reformist purebreds

like Hoan and Hoopes are thus only armed for their struggle against revolutionary ideas maturing in the S. P.

In a similar fashion was the Declaration of Principles revised in so far as bourgeois democracy is concerned. The term "bogus democracy" used in the Detroit Declaration as an evaluation of bourgeois democracy was deleted this time.

Obviously the new Declaration is an even more expansive and flexible political document which can only breed more chaos. Scarcely had the convention approached its hour of adjournment when the sundry collected conflicting elements resting on the new Declaration of Principles almost wrecked the gathering and tore the situation wide open. We have in mind the tense moments occasioned by the consideration of the resolution on the united front. It was at this time that Hoopes who had been elected to the New NEC warned the convention that he would not serve on the NEC and that Reading would not remain in the Party if the majority report on the united front were adopted by the convention. It was at this time that peace-maker Dan Hoan stepped forward and asked the convention what it wanted, why it was fighting now that the New York issue was settled and they were given what they wanted in this matter. Comrade Thomas could save the situation—for a short time at most—by yielding to the proposal of Lewis to put the whole question of the united front to a referendum vote beginning December 31st.

Let no one have any illusions about the majority report on the united front question. It was not for a joint election campaign with

the Communist Party. It proposed a carefully worked-out set of obstacles to united fronts on national, state and local scales. But—and the but loomed very big to the very large number of Right Wing delegates who did not—at this time step out with Waldman—it did not condemn in principle for eternity the idea of the united front. Even this tiny loophole for some future theoretically possible occasion was enough to rub Hoopes and the Wisconsin delegation the wrong way, to arouse their ire and to cause them to make sinister threats and ask most embarrassing questions.

One thing was clear and very clear at that at the convention. This is the attitude to Roosevelt and the New Deal. We may confidently expect the Socialist Party not to make the slightest concession to Roosevelt's candidacy. Thomas will not stump the country with speeches to the effect that *"of course the Republican Party is the main danger and that, therefore, at any rate no worker should vote for Landon or his type."* The S.P. will wage a frontal fight against Roosevelt. This is all the more welcome in view of the fact that at the beginning of the New Deal the official position of the Socialist Party was that the New Deal was a great step towards socialism. Naturally, when we say that the S.P. will have nothing to do with Roosevelt even in the most remote or indirect fashion during the campaign we must make one reservation. We must not forget that in Wisconsin the Socialist Party is now an organic part of LaFollette's Progressive Federation which it is almost certain will indorse Roosevelt. However, let no one worry about this. Dan Hoan who has just been elected chair-

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man of the campaign committee of the S.P. has been in more anomalous positions before, politically speaking.

A few words as to the Waldman faction. It gave birth to the Social Democratic Federation—an open, uncamouflaged, outright, reformist organization. The Waldman outfit boasts of being against revolutionary socialism. It is proud in being called what it is—openly Right Wing, Social Democratic along the lines of Scheidemann, Wells, Noske, Stauning, Vandervelde. This Federation will not brook even the use of a left-sounding phrase to hide its devout faith in bourgeois democracy. Its main strength is in the Jewish Daily Forward Association machine thruout the country.

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Yet let no one make the mistake that even the Jewish Daily Forward Association is solidly with Waldman. Vladeck and Held will remain with the Party.

However, it would be folly to conclude that the Waldman Federation is limited to the above forces. It has some sort of an agreement with the Finnish Federation; it has the majority of the Jewish Verband, large blocs in Montana, Washington, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and practically all of Connecticut. Ideologically, Wisconsin and Reading are much closer to the Waldman setup than to the New York Militants, the Chicago organization, or such forces like Comrade Hapgood, Comrade Fisher of Illinois, some of the New Jersey forces, and in many respects even Comrade Thomas. Waldman and his colleagues were unable to split the S.P. at Cleveland not because they did not want to but because Wisconsin which was the pivotal delegation would not come to an organization arrangement with them despite their ideological blood-brotherhood. Besides, not all of the Right Wing delegations were prepared at this time to go as far as Waldman's New York friends. Here it must be emphasized that Waldman went out of his way to make the political issues very sharp. This, one must grant regardless of how much one disagrees with his position. He minced no words politically; he sought no compromises organizationally. Had he been ready to offer himself in any way at all in either sense, he would today been inside the S.P. and very likely playing an even bigger role than before the convention.

Just now it appears that the strategy of Waldman is to have his Right Wing partners inside the SP prepare themselves for a later exit by sabotaging the party's work, particularly by interfering with the election campaign and capitalizing on the general chaotic and confused situation in the national organization. Of course, it is not at all excluded that, thru maneuvers or pressure by Hoan, Thomas and his Militants may make another herculean effort to restore to membership what they so warmly hailed at the convention as "our Right Wing." But no such move is likely until after the elections, despite the marked instability of the SP. How serious this instability is and how much of a free hand Dan Hoan has kept for himself is clearly shown by the

fact that he accepted the nomination for the NEC only *conditionally*, only on the basis that he would resign if pressure of work in Wisconsin would demand it. The New NEC or leadership is further weakened by the fact that it does not have a single member west of the Mississippi.

In summary, we must underscore that the fight for revolutionary socialism in the SP is far from over and is facing terrific obstacles. Undoubtedly, today, only a small minority of the membership is for revolutionary socialist principles. Even the best of the Militants, despite their protestations to the contrary, have not shown any clarity or consistency in their policies. At this convention, they did not even present their draft program about which they sang so many songs of praise as the model revolutionary document for the U. S. For them to have presented this document would have meant the loss of Wisconsin. For them to have lost Wisconsin would mean not to have been given the New York apparatus, the party machine in New York. That is why they made costly concession after concession in policy and principle.

The entire situation in the S.P. is further complicated and confused by the present ultra-right tactics of the Communist Party. It is the latter situation which enables the S.P. leadership to present their party as *apparently* to the left of the C.P. In words at least the new S.P. leadership can show some tangible evidence to substantiate their unfounded claim in substance. In principles the S.P., as a party continues reformist. Thru the use of certain revolutionary-sounding phrases, especially at a time when an ultra-right course is running riot in the C.P. and when the S.P. does not dare criticize frankly, the new N.E.C. is able to lead many workers to the false conclusion that the S.P. is now a revolutionary party and is even to the left of the C.P. How hollow such claims are will become clear particularly upon a examination of the basic resolutions adopted at Cleveland.

For those comrades in the S.P. who adhere to the principles of revolutionary socialism there is but one thing to do: Continue the struggle for such principles on a much more vigorous and more effective basis than ever before.

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