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# Constitution of the Socialist Party of America. [Version in effect 1917-1919]†

From the pamphlet *National Constitution and Platform of the Socialist Party, 1917.*  
(Chicago, IL: National Office, Socialist Party, 1917), pp. 1-16.

## Article I — Name.

Sec. 1. The name of this organization shall be the Socialist Party, except in such states where a different name has or may become a legal requirement.

## Article II — Membership.

Sec. 1. Every person, resident of the United States of the age of eighteen years and upward, without discrimination to sex, race, color, or creed, who has severed his connection with all other political parties and political organizations, and subscribes to the principles of the Socialist Party, including political action and unrestricted political rights for both sexes, shall be eligible to membership in the party.

Sec. 2. No person holding an elective public office by gift of any party or organization other than the Socialist Party shall be eligible to membership in the Socialist Party without the consent of his state organization; nor shall any member of the party accept or hold any appointive public office, honorary or remunerative (civil service positions excepted), without the consent of his state organization. No party member shall be a candidate for public office without the consent of the city, county, or state organizations, according to the nature of the office.

Sec. 3. A member who desires to transfer his membership from the party in one state to the party in another state may do so upon the presentation of his card showing him to be in good standing at the time of asking for such transfer and also a transfer card duly

signed by the secretary of the local from which he transfers.

Sec. 4. No member of the party, in any state or territory, shall, under any pretext, interfere with the regular or organized movement in any other state.

Sec. 5. All persons joining the Socialist Party shall sign the following pledge:

### Application for Membership in the Socialist Party

I, the undersigned, recognizing the class struggle between the capitalist class and the working class, and the necessity of the working class organizing itself into a political party for the purpose of obtaining collective ownership and democratic administration of the collectively used and socially necessary means of production and distribution, hereby apply for membership in the Socialist Party.

I have no relations (as member or supporter) with any other political party.

I am opposed to all political organizations that support and perpetuate the present capitalist profit system, and I am opposed to any form of trading or fusing with any such organizations to prolong that system.

In all my political actions while a member of the Socialist Party I agree to be guided by the constitution and platform of that party.

Sec. 6. Any member of the Socialist Party, elected to an office, who shall in any way vote to appropriate moneys for military or naval purposes, or war, shall be expelled from the party.

## Article III — Management.

Sec. 1. The affairs of the Socialist Party shall be administered by the National Executive Committee,

†- Scholars should note that the version of the SPA Constitution appearing in the report of the Lusk Committee (1920) is the subsequent version of this document, reflecting changes made at the contentious 1919 Emergency National Convention.

its sub-committees and officials, the National Convention, and the general vote of the party.

Sec. 2. (a) The National Executive Committee shall be composed of fifteen members, three of whom shall be elected by the membership of each of five territorial sub-divisions respectively as follows:

(b) District No. 1 — Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York.

(c) District No. 2 — New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana.

(d) District No. 3 — Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri.

(e) District No. 4 — Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas.

(f) District No. 5 — Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Alaska.

The members of the National Executive Committee shall be residents of their respective districts at the time they are nominated and during their term of office.

Sec. 3. (a) The call for the regular election of members of the National Executive Committee shall be issued on the first day of January, 1918, and on January 1st of each odd numbered year thereafter. Members elected in 1918 shall retire July 1st, 1919.

(b) Forty days shall be allowed for nominations, 20 days for acceptances and declinations, and 60 days for the referendum. The candidates receiving the highest votes shall in each case be declared elected. The term of their office shall be for 2 years beginning on the first day of July.

Sec. 4. Three years consecutive membership in the party shall be necessary to qualify for membership on the National Executive Committee and executive officials.

#### **Article IV — National Executive Committee.**

Sec. 1. The duties and powers of the committee shall be:

(a) To represent the party in all national and international affairs.

(b) To call National Conventions and special conventions decided upon by the referendum of the party. In case of emergency, the National Executive Committee may call special conventions by a two-thirds vote of the committee.

(c) To make reports of the membership and condition of the party organization to National Conventions, with recommendations thereon.

(d) To perfect and strengthen the organization and promote propaganda.

(e) To formulate the rules and the order of business of the National Convention of the party not otherwise provided for by this constitution, and subject to amendment and adoption by the convention.

(f) To receive dues and reports from state organizations.

(g) To conduct the national referendums in the manner provided by this constitution.

(h) To supervise the work and transact all current business of the National Office.

(i) To print the minutes of its meetings in the official organ.

(j) To print in the official organ a specific statement of all moneys expended for printing leaflets and books, with titles and authors of the same.

(k) To maintain in connection with the National Office such bureaus and departments as may be necessary.

Sec. 2. Members of the National Executive Committee elected from the districts shall be eligible to serve as organizers. Any member may be appointed lecturer on courses arranged by the National Office and may be given temporary assignments for special party work.

Sec. 3. The National Executive Committee, as required by the Federal Corrupt Practices Act, shall elect a permanent chairman who shall serve without salary.

Sec. 4. The Committee shall formulate its own rules of procedure, not inconsistent with the provisions of this constitution.

Sec. 5. Meetings of the National Executive Committee shall be held at such times and places as the committee may determine.

Sec. 6. Members and officers of the National Executive Committee shall be subject to recall by the membership of the party through referendum.

Sec. 7. The location of the National Headquarters shall be determined by the National Executive Committee.

Sec. 8. (a) No funds of the National Organization shall be appropriated by the National Executive Committee for any purpose not directly connected with the propaganda of socialism or the struggles of labor. No more than \$100 shall be appropriated to any one organization other than a sub-division of the party; and no application for financial assistance coming from locals or other sub-divisions of state organizations shall be entertained unless they have the endorsement of the state organization.

(b) The committee shall not have power to appropriate funds, except for the current expenses of the National Office, unless the party has sufficient funds on hand to meet all outstanding obligations, or unless the regular income will in the natural course of events cover such appropriations before the end of the current year. The committee shall make no appropriations, directly or indirectly, for the support of any paper or periodical not owned by the National Office.

Sec. 9. The National Office mailing lists of locals and branches and of subscribers shall not be given out to anyone outside the membership, nor shall they be given to members for private purposes. Appropriate portions of them may be given to members and party officials at any time for purposes of organization, propaganda, and renewals of subscriptions.

Sec. 10. The National Executive Committee may publish and mail to every party member a weekly organization paper devoted exclusively to party activities.

#### **Article V — Executive Secretary.**

Sec. 1. The Executive Secretary shall be employed by the National Executive Committee. He may be removed at any time by the committee or by referendum vote of the membership. He shall give bonds in the amount fixed by the committee. His compensation shall be fixed by the National Executive Committee.

Sec. 2. The Executive Secretary shall have charge of all affairs of the National Office, including the employment of necessary help subject to the directions of the National Executive Committee. He shall super-

vised the accounts of the National Office and its departments.

Sec. 3. The Executive Secretary shall cause to be published in the official organ of the party all important official reports and announcements; a monthly report of the financial affairs of the party; a summary of the conditions and the membership of the several state and territorial organizations; the principal business transacted by the national officials; and such other matters pertaining to the organization of the party as may be of general interest to the membership.

#### **Article VI — Woman's Propaganda.**

Sec. 1. One half the amount received by the National Office for dual dues stamps shall be set aside as a special fund for propaganda among women, to be used exclusively for this purpose, under the direction of the Executive Secretary.

#### **Article VII — Representatives in Congress.**

Sec. 1. Members of Congress elected on the ticket of the Socialist Party shall submit reports of their actions in Congress to the National Committee.

Sec. 2. In the support of measures proposed by the Socialist Party, they shall carry out instructions which may be given by the National Conventions, the National Executive Committee, or by a general referendum of the party.

Sec. 3. In all legislative bodies, as Congress, State Legislatures, Boards of Supervisors, or Town Councils, Socialist Party members shall organize into a group separate and apart from all other parties. They shall elect a chairman and in the support of all measures definitely declared for in the platforms of the party, they shall vote as a unit.

#### **Article VIII — Conferences of State Secretaries.**

Sec. 1. An organization conference composed of the State Secretaries, the Executive Secretary, the National Executive Committee, one representative from the Foreign Language Federations, and one representative from the Young People's Socialist League, shall

be held annually, except in years when National Conventions are held, at a time and place to be fixed by the National Executive Committee. Its work shall be confined to mutual conference and advice concerning problems of administration, propaganda, and organization. This conference shall neither initiate nor suggest legislation or constitutional amendments.

Sec. 2. Railroad fare of delegates to these conferences shall be paid from the national treasury.

### **Article IX — Conventions.**

Sec. 1. The regular National Conventions of the party shall be held in all years in which elections for President and Vice President of the United States are to be held.

Sec. 2. Special conventions of the party may be held at any time if decided upon by a general vote of the party membership, or by a two-thirds vote of the National Executive Committee.

Sec. 3. The date and place of the regular conventions shall be fixed by the National Executive Committee.

Sec. 4. The National Convention shall be composed of 200 delegates to be apportioned among the states in the following manner:

One from each state and territory and the remainder in proportion to the average national dues paid by the organization of such states and territories during the preceding year. No delegate shall be eligible unless he is a resident member of the state from which his credential is presented, and shall have been a member of the party organization at least three years.

Sec. 5. Railroad fare, including tourist sleeper carfare, of delegates to and from the conventions of the party and the per diem allowance of \$2.50 to cover expenses shall be paid from the national treasury, by setting aside a portion of the national dues sufficient to cover the same, to be estimated at the beginning of each year.

Sec. 6. (a) The election of delegates to the National Convention shall, wherever possible, be completed not later than 60 days preceding the convention, and the respective State Secretaries shall furnish the Executive Secretary with a list of accredited delegates immediately after said election.

(b) The Executive Secretary shall prepare a printed

roster of the accredited delegates to be sent to each delegate and forwarded to the party press for publication. Such list shall contain the occupation of each delegate at the time of his nomination and his office or employment in the party. All official reports required to be presented to the National Convention shall be printed and sent to each delegate elected at least 15 days before the date of the convention and furnished to the party press for publication.

(c) At the time and place set for the opening of the National Convention, the Executive Secretary shall call the convention to order, and shall call the roll to ascertain the number of uncontested delegates, and they shall permanently organize the convention.

Sec. 7. The National Convention shall have the power to nominate candidates for President and Vice President, to adopt a national platform, and to transact such other business as the convention may see fit. Vacancies on the national tickets shall be filled by the National Executive Committee.

Sec. 8. All national platforms, amendments of platforms, and resolutions adopted by any National Convention shall be submitted seriatim to a referendum vote of the membership. One-fourth of the regularly elected delegates shall be entitled to have alternative paragraphs to be submitted at the same time. Such alternative paragraphs, signed with one-fourth of such delegates, shall be filed with the Executive Secretary not later than one day after the adjournment of the convention.

### **Article X — State Organizations.**

Sec. 1. The formation of all state or territorial organizations or the organization of state or territorial organizations which may have lapsed shall be under the directions of the Executive Committee.

Sec. 2. No state or territory may be organized unless it has at least 10 locals or an aggregate membership of not less than 200, but this provision shall not affect the rights of states and territories organized prior to the adoption of this constitution. When the membership of any state averages less than 150 per month for any 6 consecutive months, the National Committee may revoke the charter of that state.

Sec. 3. (a) The platform of the Socialist Party shall be the supreme declaration of the party, and all state

and municipal platforms shall conform thereto. No state or local organization shall under any circumstances fuse, combine, or compromise with any other political party or organization, or refrain from making nominations, in order to favor the candidate of such other organizations, nor shall any candidate of the Socialist Party accept any nomination or endorsement from any other party or political organization.

(b) No member of the Socialist Party shall, under any circumstances, vote in any political election for any candidate other than Socialist Party members nominated, endorsed, or recommended as candidates by the Socialist Party, or advocate voting for them. To do so will constitute party treason and result in expulsion from the party.

Sec. 4. In states and territories in which there is one central organization affiliated with the party, the state or territorial organization shall have the sole jurisdiction of the members residing within their respective territories, and the sole control of all matters pertaining to the propaganda, organization, and financial affairs within such state or territory; provided, such propaganda is in harmony with the national platform and declared policy of the party. Their activity shall be confined to their respective organizations, and the National Committee, or its sub-committees or officers, shall have no right to interfere in such matters without the consent of the respective state or territorial organizations.

Sec. 5. (a) The State Committees shall make monthly reports to the Executive Secretary concerning their membership, financial condition, and general standing of the party.

(b) During the months of January and July of each year, or at any other time required by the Executive Committee or by this constitution, the State Secretaries shall furnish the Executive Secretary a list of all locals affiliated with their respective state organizations, together with the number of members in good standing, and the name and address of the Corresponding Secretary of each local. Refusal, failure, or neglect to comply with this section shall subject the state organization to suspension from the Socialist Party and deprive such state organization of participation in the affairs of the Socialist Party, and shall be a forfeiture of the right to representation in the National Executive Committee, the conventions, and congresses of the

party.

Sec. 6. The State Committees shall pay to the National Office every month a sum equal to 5 cents for each member in good standing within their respective states and territories. And only dues stamps issued by the National Executive Committee shall be affixed to members' dues cards as valid receipts for the payment of dues.

Sec. 7. (a) The National Office shall also issue to the State Secretaries exempt stamps, both regular and special, free of charge, to be used by party members temporarily unable to pay dues on account of unemployment caused by sickness, strikes, lockouts, or any other condition not within their control.

(b) Any member desiring to use such exempt stamps shall make application therefor to the financial secretary of his local organization, and such application shall be passed upon by such organization. Exempt stamps shall be issued only to members in good standing who have paid dues for at least three months and who are by the same action exempt from the payment of dues to the state and local organization. The number of exempt stamps shall not exceed 10 percent of the total number of stamps obtained by the respective state organizations. The acceptance of exempt stamps by any member shall in no way disqualify such member from any rights and privileges of party membership.

(c) The National Office shall also issue a double perforated stamp to the State Secretaries at the rate of 10 cents per stamp, one-half of such stamp to be affixed to membership card of husband and other half to that of wife. Husbands and wives desiring to use such stamp shall make application to the financial secretary of their local and such application shall be passed upon by such organization.

Sec. 8. All state organizations shall provide in their constitutions for the initiative, referendum, and imperative mandate.

Sec. 9. No person shall be nominated or endorsed by any sub-division of the party for candidate for public office unless he is a member of the party and has been such for at least two years, except with the consent of the state organization. But this provision shall not apply to organizations which have been in existence for less than two years.

Sec. 10. When a controversy exists in a state orga-

nization, the Executive Secretary shall continue to sell dues stamps to the Secretary recognized by him before such controversy is officially brought before him, until a state referendum has decided otherwise. He shall take no action except on petition of 10 percent of the locals (but not less than 3 locals), which must be located in different localities, appearing on the last official list filed with him by the State Secretary at least 3 months prior to the controversy, and then only if there is doubt as to who is State Secretary. In such case he shall hold a referendum of those locals reported on the last official list to determine who is State Secretary. The individual signed ballots in such referendum shall be sent to the Executive Secretary.

### **Article XI — International Delegates and International Secretary.**

Sec. 1. Delegates to the International Congress and International Secretary shall be elected by referendum in the year in which the Congress is held. The call for nominations shall be made on the first day of January. To qualify as a candidate, one must receive the nomination from at least seven locals located in two or more states. Forty days shall be allowed for nominations, 15 for acceptances and declinations, and 60 for the referendum. There shall be one delegate for every 20,000 members, ascertained by computing the average for the preceding year. The requisite number of candidates receiving the highest number of votes shall be elected. The next highest in the election shall be the alternates. The expenses of the delegates and a per diem equal to the per diem fixed for national organizers and lecturers shall be paid out of the national treasury.

### **Article XII — Foreign-Speaking Federations.**

Sec. 1. Five branches of the Socialist Party working in any other language than English shall have the right to form a National Federation under the supervision of the Executive Secretary and the Executive Committee.

Sec. 2. Such National Language Federation shall have the right to elect an officer known as Translator-Secretary, who shall be conversant with his own language as well as the English language, and whose duty

it shall be to serve as a medium of communication between his federation and the national organization of the Socialist Party.

Sec. 3. When such National Language Federation shall have at least 1,000 members, their Translator-Secretary shall be entitled to necessary office room in the National Office, and to a salary from the national body not to exceed \$28 per week, nor to be less than \$15, the exact sum to be fixed by the Executive Committee of the Socialist Party. Such Translator-Secretary must be at least three consecutive years a member of the party, except when his federation has not been affiliated with the party that length of time. When any Language Federation is reduced to 1,000 members, the rights of that Language Federation to office room and salaries shall be suspended at the discretion of the Executive Committee.

Sec. 4. (a) Language Federations shall pay to the National Office the same sum monthly per capita as paid by the state organizations, receiving in exchange therefor dues stamps. They shall also pay through the Translator-Secretary to the regular state and county or city organization 50 percent of the dues paid by the English-speaking branches.

(b) The Translation-Secretary shall pay monthly to the respective State Secretaries the quota of all monthly dues paid by the branches of his federation in the state. The State Secretary shall forward the county dues to the respective County Secretaries, wherever there is an organized county.

Sec. 5. (a) Branches of Language Federations shall be an integral part of the county and state organizations, and must in all cases work in harmony with the constitution and platform of the state and county organizations of the Socialist Party.

Language branches, not affiliated with a federation of their respective language, shall work in harmony with such federation, restricting their work within the territorial jurisdiction of such branches. In no case, however, shall such branches indulge in or permit their members to carry on work against the interests of the federation. Federations shall not be permitted to organize additional branches not affiliated with them, except with the consent of the state organizations. The charter of any language branch not affiliated with a federation that condones or conducts work aiming at the destruction of a federation shall be

revoked by the state organization in accordance with the method of procedure provided by the constitution of the state organization. When the charter of such branch is revoked, such of its members who will agree to refrain from similar objectionable work in the future shall be organized in a new branch. But no member of a branch, the charter of which has been revoked for the offense mentioned above, shall be denied admission to the new branch if a statement is signed obligating himself to work in harmony of the provisions of the section.

(b) A Language Federation may, if its constitution so provides, exclude for cause any of the branches or locals affiliated with it. Such excluded locals and language branches shall lose only the rights and privileges dependant upon affiliation with the federation. They shall continue to be an integral part of the county and state organizations, until such time as the exclusion has been approved by the county and state organizations.

Members of a federation cannot be suspended or expelled from the party by the federation or by any of its sub-divisions, the power to suspend or expel members from the party being vested exclusively in the county and state organizations. The accused members shall be accorded a fair trial in the manner provided by the county and state constitutions or local by-laws.

Members of a federation can be suspended from membership in any of its sub-divisions by the sub-division to which the member belongs for work detrimental to the welfare of the federation involved. Such suspended members, unless the suspension has been approved by the county and state organizations, shall continue to be members of the party, and the county and state organizations shall either attach them to some other local or branch, or recognize them as members-at-large.

Sec. 6. All propaganda work of the language federations shall be carried out under the supervision of their executive officers according to the by-laws of the federations. Such by-laws must be in conformity with the constitution of the Socialist Party.

Sec. 7. Each Translator-Secretary shall submit a monthly report of the dues stamps sold during that period to the national and state offices. He shall make every 3 months, also, a report of the general standing of his federation to the National Office.

Sec. 8. The national party shall not recognize more than one federation of the same language.

Sec. 9. Each national federation shall be entitled to elect 1 fraternal delegate to the National Conventions of the party; provided, that such delegate shall have a voice but no vote. He shall receive railroad fare and per diem from the party the same as regular delegates.

### **Article XIII — Referendum.**

Sec. 1. Motions or resolutions to be voted upon by the entire membership of the party, except proposed amendments to the national constitution, shall be submitted by the Executive Secretary to the referendum vote of the party membership upon the request of locals representing at least 5 percent of the entire membership on the basis of dues paid in the preceding year.

The term "local" as herein used shall be construed to mean a local or branch of a local, but not a body composed of delegates from branches or locals.

Sec. 2. Each motion and resolution shall be printed in the official bulletin and remain open 90 days from the date of first publication, and, if it has not then received the requisite number of seconds, it shall be abandoned. The vote on each referendum shall close 60 days after its submission.

Sec. 3. Referendums shall be submitted without preamble or comment. But comment not to exceed 200 words both for and against may accompany the motion when printed.

Sec. 4. Any officer who attempts to interfere with the processes of the membership shall be expelled from office.

Sec. 5. Whenever a motion, resolution, or an amendment has been regularly initiated and passed upon by the party membership, another motion that conflicts with the same shall not be considered for at least 6 months.

### **Article XIV — Young People's Socialist League.**

Sec. 1. The work of the Young People's Socialist League in the national field shall be under the control and direction of the Executive Committee of the Socialist Party.

Sec. 2. Branches of the Young People's Socialist League shall be under the control of the city, county, or state organizations, and must in all cases work in harmony with the constitution and platform of the city, county, or state organizations of the Socialist Party.

Sec. 3. The Young People's Socialist League shall be entitled to elect one fraternal delegate, having a voice but no vote, to the National Conventions. He shall receive railroad fare and per diem from the party the same as regular delegates.

### **Article XV — Amendments.**

Sec. 1. This constitution may be amended by a referendum of the party membership; amendments may be proposed by the National Convention, or upon the request of locals representing at least 8 percent of the entire membership on the basis of dues paid in the preceding year. All such amendments to be submitted seriatim to a referendum vote of the party membership.

The term "local" as herein used shall be construed to mean a local or branch of a local, but not a body composed of delegates from branches or locals.

Sec. 2. All amendments shall take effect 60 days after being approved by the membership.

*Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.*

*Second Edition — October 2006: Corrects typographical errors and alters typography.*

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