
“Thumbs Down” is Socialists’ Edict: Can’t See Labor Party — Caution Governs Deliberations at 8th Convention

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The Socialist Party, first of American political parties to hold its nominating convention, met in New York City last week [May 8-14, 1920] and nominated Eugene V. Debs for President and Seymour Stedman for Vice President. The former is serving a term of 10 years in Atlanta prison for violation of the Espionage Act, while the latter is known as the party’s lawyer.

Conservatives were easily the winners in the party deliberations. Proposals to affiliate with the 3rd International of Moscow were adopted only after acceptance of “reservations” against a dictatorship of the proletariat in the form of soviets. A platform calling for socialization was adopted.

The Labor Party came in for a panning, and cooperation in this country with other political groups whose views are in accord with those contained in Socialist Party platforms was specifically turned down by the convention.

Won’t Restore Seniority Rights.

While other groups were invited to support Debs for President, it was decided that if Communists or Communist Labor Party members who

left the Socialist Party wish to return they must come in as new members and without the restoration of any seniority rights they may have held.†

Telegrams were dispatched to James H. Maurer, President of the Pennsylvania State Federation of Labor, asking him to accept the nomination for Vice President. One telegram, which was signed by 30 delegates, including Morris Hillquit, chairman of the convention, Berger, Engdahl, Tucker, and Kruse, declared that Maurer is “the only one who has the complete confidence of the labor masses.” Maurer declined, as he had decided to link his fortunes with the Labor Party of the United States. The Pennsylvania Federation, meeting at the same time, went over the top for the Labor Party.

Committees on Friday and Saturday [May 14-15, 1920] interviewed Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer and Secretary [Joseph] Tumulty, asking for amnesty for Eugene V. Debs, Kate Richards O’Hare, and other political prisoners. Another committee interviewed Governor Smith of New York, asking him to veto the “Lusk” and “Fearon” bills designed to outlaw the Socialist Party.

†- In other words, returning members would not be eligible to be party officers or convention delegates for the constitutionally-specified period of minimum membership — 3 years.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.

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