

DAILY PEOPLE

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ONE CENT.

CORRESPONDENCE

JAMES CONNOLLY'S REPORT TO THE STATE CONVENTION OF NEW JERSEY.

I.

Jersey City, N.J., Feb. 25, 1907.

DANIEL DE LEON, Editor *The People*, New York.

Comrade:—We, the undersigned: Carl Zimmermann, Section Hoboken, George P. Herrschaft, N.J. S.E.C., John Hossack, and Rudolph Katz, two who were delegates to the State Convention of the Socialist Labor Party of New Jersey, held February 22nd last, in Hoboken, and the rest of the signers, who were in attendance at the said convention, desire from you, through the columns of *The People*, an answer upon the following matter:

Comrade James Connolly, the New Jersey member on the National Executive Committee, reported that at the last meeting of the N.E.C., it had voted away its right of supervision over the Editor and the contents of *The People*. That in so far as even Party notices, letters, etc., are concerned the N.E.C. voted that the Editor of *The People* should he see fit, has the power to deny them publication. Comrade Connolly reported that this action of the N.E.C. took place upon a motion by him that the Editor of *The People* had no say in the publishing of matter ordered printed by the N.E.C. or its Sub-Committee. He said he voted for his motion and two others did, but that four members voted against the motion and defeated it.

Upon the strength of Connolly's presentation of the case the convention, with but two dissenting, voted to sustain the action of their N.E.C. member, Connolly regretted that he did not have with him the minutes of the N.E.C. meeting which he claimed would confirm his contention.

This affair puzzles us. In the absence of the minutes and seeing that Connolly referred to the Editor of *The People* as having been present at the N.E.C. meeting and that sentiment for him dictated the action of the N.E.C., our conclusion is that you must have favored the action of the N.E.C. Therefore we ask that this letter be published in *The People* together with the explanation which, as Party members, we demand of you.

Fraternally,

Carl Zimmermann,
George P. Herrschaft,
John Hossack,
Rudolph Katz.

II.

Daily People, 2–6 New Reade St.,

New York, Feb. 26, 1907.

Carl Zimmermann

George P. Herrschaft

John Hossack

Rudolph Katz

New Jersey

Comrades—

Your special delivery letter of yesterday just received. I lay aside everything to respond immediately to your demand.

I do not wonder you are puzzled. What Party member, aware of the Party's matchless democracy and self-enforced discipline, could fail to be puzzled! I also congratulate you on the method that you adopt for clarification. There is no clarifier like publicity—the fullest publicity possible.

Connolly's report does not square with the facts. The thinnest skeleton of the minutes of the National Executive Committee must reveal a record different from that which Connolly's report would suggest.

Before stating the facts in the case, allow me, in all frankness, to say that you are yourselves responsible, in part, for the quandary in which your minds are now in. Connolly's report should have suggested to you, on the spot, a certain question, and the question should have been put to Connolly then and there. The answer, the only answer, he could have made, would have forthwith knocked the bottom from under the report, and thereby removed your quandary.

The members of the N.E.C. do not meet to make motions for the fun of the thing; they are not even a "constitutional convention," gathered for the purpose of embodying abstract principles in statutory resolutions. They meet to transact the practical business of the Party that comes up before them. Whatever resolution is offered by any of them, and considered, must be the direct consequence of matter that lies before them. Something must have happened to provoke, cause and warrant the act. Otherwise the act is in the air. Now, then, the question that Connolly's report suggested was this: "Had the Editor of *The People* presumed to

refuse publication to anything sent him by the N.E.C.?" The only answer possible to the question would have been "NO!" Even if that question had been followed by no further questions, bringing out further facts, the answer would have revealed to you the baselessness of the report that the N.E.C., by voting down Connolly's motion, had "voted away its right of supervision over the Editor and the contents of *The People*," and that "in so far as even Party notices, letters, etc., are concerned, the N.E.C. voted that the Editor of *The People*, should he see fit, has the power to deny them publication." The answer would have revealed to you the existence of a state of things that the report had omitted to make mention of—a state of things entirely different from that which the report would suggest to the mind.

The facts, in the fullness that you demand, are:

The issue raised by the motion that Connolly made and was voted down, was not a special issue. It was an issue that sprang up almost immediately upon the meeting of the N.E.C., and that turned, not upon the Editor of *The People*, or the N.E.C., but upon the FUNCTIONS OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE of the N.E.C. That issue grew in importance during the very first day of the sessions of the N.E.C., which lasted until late at night, when the acts of the Sub-Committee with regard to the Business and Mechanical Departments of *The People* were under consideration. There was a difference of opinion among the members of the Sub-Committee of the N.E.C., possibly also among the members of the N.E.C. itself, as to the powers, rights and duties of the Sub-Committee of the N.E.C. That difference of opinion can be condensed in the following question: "Is the Sub-Committee of the N.E.C. the N.E.C. itself, vested with all the functions of the N.E.C., when the latter is not in session; or, are the functions of the Sub-Committee of the N.E.C. limited in their sphere?" On the morning of the second day the matter came to a head. The history, back of the change in the Party's constitution, that led the National Convention of 1904, together with the general vote of the Party, to re-organize the N.E.C. as at present organized—providing for a member from each organized State, and providing for a Sub-Committee to be elected from this immediate vicinity—was gone over in full. Quoting from the circular issued on Nov. 22, 1902, by Section Greater New York, which circular enumerated the evils attendant upon the then system of organizing the N.E.C., and which called for the change, it was shown that the

turmoil which the Party found itself thrown into with periodical frequency, was, if not wholly due to, at least promoted and invited by a system of organization under which the Party's highest executive body was chosen from ONE locality. It was shown that such a system was structurally defective, firstly, in that local frictions, unavoidable wherever men meet in numbers, were unavoidably carried into the N.E.C., and thus became "national"; secondly, in that the large majority of the Party membership, outside of the locality that alone furnished the membership for the N.E.C., was left without immediate participation in, therefore without immediate knowledge of, therefore without immediate responsibility for the national and international acts of the Party. Upon these considerations, the N.E.C. adopted unanimously, on the morning of January 7, an explicit resolution. I quote literally from the report of the transactions of the second day's session of the N.E.C., as furnished by the Secretary of the N.E.C., and as published in the *Daily People* of January 8, 1907 (*Weekly*, January 12).

"The Manager of the *Daily People* plant then continued his report, going over in detail the events of his administration. In his report he discussed at length the responsibilities and irresponsibilities of the Sub-Committee of the N.E.C., and thereupon the following resolutions on the National Executive Committee and the Sub-Committee were presented by Richter (Mich.), and adopted unanimously:

"Whereas, The reasons that guided the Party in 1904 to remodel the organization of the National Executive Committee, and institute the present system of a National Committee and of a Sub-Committee, are the reasons set forth in the circular issued by Section Greater New York to the Sections of the Party, calling attention upon the dangers of the then existing system, and dated November 22, 1902; therefore be it

"Resolved, That the function of the Sub-Committee is to attend only to the routine work of the National Committee, and to such other matters of an emergency nature as may arise demanding immediate action during the periods when the National Committee is not in session. In all other matters not of a routine nature, and not in the nature of an emergency, the Sub-Committee shall, according as its judgment may dictate, either await the assembling of the National Committee or submit the matter, with its recommendations, to the members of the National Committee through the National Secretary, for their decision."

The principle, or issue, involved in the resolution was of vital importance to the Party's integrity. Such a danger, as the recurrence of the former evils, above

enumerated, had to be prevented. That the danger was imminent, and imminent, in consequence, the undoing by members of ONE locality, of the work of the 1904 National Convention, together with the general vote which established the new system of organizing the N.E.C. and administering the Party's affairs,—that such a danger was imminent the tenor of the resolution proves. The functions of the Sub-Committee of the N.E.C. had to be defined; they were defined; they were defined in denial of the opinion that the Sub-Committee of the N.E.C. was the N.E.C. itself and vested with all the functions of the N.E.C. when the latter is not in session; they were defined in accordance with the view that the functions of the Sub-Committee of the N.E.C. are limited in their sphere. The resolution specifies the limitations.

Clear cut though the resolution was, it transpired in the course of the sessions of that same day that there was still some confusion lingering behind. In view of this fact, I—not the Sub-Committee of the N.E.C., least of all the N.E.C. itself—I brought up before the N.E.C. a matter referring to certain occurrences between the Sub-Committee of the N.E.C. and this Editorial Department. It was the matter of the Transvaal letter.

The Independent Labor Party of the Transvaal had sent a letter in September of last year to our N.E.C., stating its platform, stating it had a campaign on its hands, and asking for financial support. That letter was answered by our National Secretary, Frank Bohn, authorized thereto by the Sub-Committee of the N.E.C., and ordered published in *The People*. I pointed out serious defects of omission in the answer, although that answer, as far as it went, was excellent—ABOVE ALL I POINTED OUT TO THE SUB-COMMITTEE THAT, IN UNDERTAKING TO ANSWER THAT LETTER THEMSELVES, THEY WERE EXCEEDING THEIR POWERS, BY ASSUMING POWERS THAT BELONGED TO THE N.E.C. I argued with the Sub-Committee of the N.E.C. that the present system of organization of the Party's N.E.C. was intended, among other things, to have the whole Party manage its own affairs, and bear the responsibility of its acts, especially in matters of importance; I argued that the Party's foreign relations were of that nature: that the matter should have been submitted to the members of the N.E.C. and an answer sent only with their approval, and record thereof made in the minutes. Finally I

argued that only in cases of EMERGENCY could the Sub-Committee, a body consisting of members of ONE circumscribed neighborhood, act in such a matter, and that there was no emergency in the case. I was answered that an emergency did exist, because the Transvaal party had an election on its hands, was demanding funds to conduct its campaign, and, if the members of the N.E.C. were to be first consulted, the answer to the Transvaal party could reach it too late, only after its elections were over. My reply was that I could understand such a reasoning if the opinion of the Sub-Committee of the N.E.C. was that the Transvaal party SHOULD receive from us the financial aid which it asked; but that, seeing the Committee had very correctly decided to REFUSE granting such financial aid, it could be of no practical consequence whether the Transvaal party received the news early or late. The Sub-Committee of the N.E.C. did not accept my views. Thereupon, expressly stating to them my recognition of the subaltern position of the Editor of *The People* to them, in an emergency that should cause them to decide that the Editor should be suspended from office; expressly stating that in such a case I would hold my overcoat and hat ready in my hands to vacate the office; expressly stating that obviously they did not think the present case one that would justify such extreme measures; expressing my gladness that none but friendly, as to several of them even intimate, relations existed between myself and them. I considered the issue involved of sufficient magnitude to bring it before the N.E.C. and have it threshed out there, free from the complication of the friction that otherwise unfortunately, and but too frequently, attached to differences of opinion. Accordingly, I wrote to Bohn in this sense, informing him that I would take my appeal to the N.E.C. in the matter. The facts and reasoning, just shortly summarized, I laid in full before the N.E.C., adding that I was driven thereto because other things, that had come to the surface in course of the investigation of the relations of the Sub-Committee of the N.E.C. with the Business and Mechanical Departments of *The People*, had caused me to take alarm, and to apprehend the recurrence of the old evils which flowed from N.E.C. functions being exercised by members from ONE neighborhood. Such was the issue when Connolly made the motion which he made before the N.E.C. The issue, accordingly, again was, Is the Sub-Committee of the N.E.C. vested with the full functions of the N.E.C., when the latter is not in session? The issue had been

broadly settled in the morning by the resolution then unanimously adopted. The Transvaal letter affair furnished a concrete case by which to interpret the resolution practically.

At the beginning of this letter I pointed out to you an inaccuracy of OMISSION in Connolly's report. I now must mention an inaccuracy of COMMISSION in the report. The motion that Connolly made was not that "the Editor of *The People* has no say in the publishing of matter ordered printed by the N.E.C. or its Sub-Committee." Had that been his motion, that part of it that referred to the N.E.C. itself would have been promptly ruled out of order, there being no issue as to the rights of the N.E.C., the functions of the N.E.C. being undisputed and indisputable. The issue was exclusively as to the rights, or functions, of the Sub-Committee of the N.E.C. I had at no time refused the publication of anything ordered published by the N.E.C. Nothing that I said could be construed as questioning the N.E.C.'s rights in the premises. Indeed, my whole contention was that the Sub-Committee of the N.E.C. had trespassed upon functions vested in the N.E.C. I shall not attempt to reproduce the exact wording of Connolly's motion, not having taken a memorandum of it. It, however, concerned the Sub-Committee of the N.E.C. When the resolution adopted on the morning of the 7th, and cited above in full, was being considered, Connolly sought to weaken it by fastening a "rider" upon it. Having failed in that, his present motion was intended to scuttle the resolution. The purport of Connolly's motion was to vest in the Sub-Committee the power to print in *The People* whatever documents, letters, etc., it chose to issue. There being nothing but that question before the house when I got through presenting the case of the Transvaal, and Connolly's motion being made immediately after I got through, the lines upon which the discussion immediately started were confined wholly to the Sub-Committee. I recall no mention made of the N.E.C. except by myself when, addressing the N.E.C. on Connolly's motion, I said that even if the motion contemplated the N.E.C. itself, so sweeping a motion would be senseless, where it is not superfluous—whatever sense such a motion would contain would be superfluous, because the functions of the N.E.C. were undisputed and indisputable; on the other hand, whatever would not be superfluous in such a motion would be senseless, because I could not imagine an N.E.C. so stuck upon itself that it would spurn improvements, suggested to it by

the Editor, or by any other Party member, for that matter, to whatever communication it might send for publication; nor could I imagine an N.E.C. so stubbornly dull as to insist upon the publication of matter which the Editor's knowledge of the law of libel, as applied to newspapers, would warn him might cause his personal arrest for libel; and that common sense and mutual good will alone could meet contingencies of that nature, all of them beyond the reach of express statutory provision. Apart from these incidental remarks referring to the N.E.C., my arguments were confined to the case before us—the Sub-Committee. So were the arguments of the members of the N.E.C., Connolly included. What was defeated was, accordingly, not a motion stating the rights of the N.E.C. What was defeated was a motion that sought to give the Sub-Committee of the N.E.C. the powers of the N.E.C., regardless of emergencies, and as a matter of course.

Two incidents, that followed each other immediately upon the defeat of Connolly's motion, are corroborative of the fact, if further corroboration were needed, that the N.E.C. had not passed upon its own, but upon the functions of its Sub-Committee exclusively, when it voted down Connolly's motion.

The first of the two incidents was the motion of Richter (Mich.) defining the word "emergency," which occurs in the resolution adopted on the morning of the 7th. In the course of the discussion on the matter of the Transvaal letter, a member of the Sub-Committee, Moren, who was present, had stated his understanding of the rights of the Sub-Committee of the N.E.C. in the following words: "The Sub-Committee has the right to act in all cases, emergency or no emergency, except, possibly, some extreme case." Furthermore, in the course of the discussion on Connolly's motion the theory had been advanced by Bohn that an "emergency," as contemplated in the resolution passed on the morning of the 7th, arose if the Sub-Committee apprehended that its views on some important matter might not coincide with the views of the N.E.C.; but that, if the N.E.C. entertained no such apprehension, then there was no "emergency"; and that for that reason, the Sub-Committee having no doubt how the N.E.C. would feel in the matter of the Transvaal, the Sub-Committee was justified in answering the Transvaal letter without consulting the N.E.C. Neither this theory, nor the theory of Moren, commended itself, and justly so, I think, to Richter. Richter, accordingly, presented

the following motion, immediately upon the defeat of Connolly's motion: "The N.E.C. holds that an 'emergency' arises before the Sub-Committee whenever, if action is not taken immediately, injury would result to the S.L.P." (*Daily People*, Jan. 9; *Weekly*, Jan. 12).—Corroborative of the fact that it was the Sub-Committee, not the N.E.C., itself, that was under consideration. The motion was carried.

The second incident was a statement made by me, and carried into effect in *The People*. In the course of his speech, in support of his motion, Connolly had made the remark that, seeing that I did not find fault with anything contained in the answer which the Sub-Committee of the N.E.C. had sent to the Transvaal, but only found fault with the omission of certain statements, the proper course for me to have followed would have been to have published the answer simultaneously with an editorial supplementing the same. In my answer to his speech in support of his motion, I omitted all reference to this point. I did so because the point was irrelevant, and conducive only to a wandering away from the real point at issue—whether, without there being an "emergency," the Sub-Committee of the N.E.C. could take upon itself to act on so unroutine a matter as to express the Party's policy towards foreign parties. Connolly's motion having been defeated; the defeat of the motion being the denial of the powers assumed by the Sub-Committee in the premises; and the point having been immediately emphasized by the carrying of Richter's motion, I then stated that now I could do what Connolly had claimed I should have done before, but could not have done before without contributing my share towards promoting the dangerous misconception by the Sub-Committee of the N.E.C. as to its own functions—a misconception that threatened to throw the Party back into the turmoils and other evils, from which the present system of organizing the N.E.C. had rescued it. I stated I would now publish the answer to the Transvaal seeing a completer one could no longer be written—the answer having been forwarded soon as written—together with an editorial to supplement its defects of omission. That was done in the *Daily People* of January 18th (*Weekly*, 26th). And right here I should refresh your memories upon a Letter-Box answer which appeared in the *Daily People* of January 27th (*Weekly*, Feb. 2d) directly bearing upon the issue before us. P.L. Quinlan, a Party member, having written to inquire why the long delay in publishing the Transvaal letter and the answer thereto, a

delay that was apparent from the dates that the documents bore, Quinlan received this answer:

“P.L.Q., Newark, N.J.—The letter to the Transvaal was not published sooner because its publication required the sanction of the N.E.C.”

There can be no doubt what it was the N.E.C. did, and I countenanced. There can be no doubt that the N.E.C. did not “vote away its rights of supervision over the Editor and the contents of *The People*.” It was all about the Sub-Committee of the N.E.C. The N.E.C. could not, if it would, “vote away its rights,” which means the DUTIES, imposed upon it by the Party's constitution. What the N.E.C. did was to decide that its functions were not vested in its Sub-Committee. There can be no doubt that there was nothing done to place the Party's N.E.C., and thereby the Party itself, in so ridiculous and so false a light, as Connolly's report does.

Upon first reading your letter, the feeling that came over me was one of pain at the thought of having to give time to such matters, especially at this moment when I am overloaded with work, being about to undertake a prolonged agitation tour in the West. In the measure, however, as I proceeded with this answer, my pain vanished. I realized that the issue which had confronted the N.E.C. and was wisely disposed of by it, deserved full and public treatment, even if the provocation was a painful one, and all the more seeing that there is danger of the action of the N.E.C. being misrepresented.

This is the explanation of my conduct in the matter. For the rest, I refer you to the N.E.C. itself.

Fraternally yours,

DANIEL DE LEON.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
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slpns@slp.org