
Finns Have a Plan for Socialist Work:

Difficulties of the Foreign-Speaking People Pointed Out and Remedy Suggested

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One of the most interesting and vital questions to come before the National Congress of the Socialist Party next week will be the attempt to better define the relations between the English and foreign-speaking Socialist organizations in the United States.

This country faces an immigration problem entirely different from anything that confronts the Socialist parties of the nations of Europe. In the same manner the problem of organizing all the various nationalities that come to this country is one peculiar to the United States.

Finns Take Action.

This question will come before the National Congress [Chicago: May 15-21, 1910] on a motion to be presented by the national Finnish Socialist organization, along lines just adopted by the Executive Committee of that body. The Finns have been the pioneers in the organization of their people in this country, now having a compact, harmonious membership.

At the National Convention the Finns will move "That the organizing of the foreign-speaking nationalities should not be hindered by any county, assembly, senatorial, or any other districts. Wherever such district organizations are constituted for the promotion of the interests of the Socialist Party, the foreign-speaking Socialists should be allowed to reserve the right to form locals of their own in their own particular language."

This entire matter has been gone over by the Finnish Executive Committee. Further plans will be made in the conference of the delegates to the National Congress from all the foreign-speaking organizations, which is to be held Friday [May 13, 1910] at the national headquarters.

Statement Issued.

The Finns have issued a statement covering the effort to “remove the hindrance to the organization of different nationalities,” as follows:

We the Socialists of the Finnish and other nationalities have had a bitter experience as to the inconvenience and obstruction that all the one-sided district limitations, such as county, senatorial, and congressional, cause the foreign-speaking organizations.

This system does not allow foreign-speaking Socialists to form their own language branches, but compels them to belong to one English-speaking local within the limitations of the district, where they must act, vote, and bring forth any proposals for the development of Socialism.

We know that restrictions such as these mean better organizing, but experience shows that they do not bring good results. Instead the whole party has been hurt by them.

A great many Socialists remain out of the party because they do not speak English, and because they could not present their own opinions at the meeting of an English-speaking local, though the members of the local be comrades.

We point to San Francisco, Cal., as an example. There there senatorial district limitations were put into effect and the result was that all the Finns, Germans, Poles, Russians, and Socialists of other nationalities quit the party.

Similar obstructions exist in Buffalo, Chicago, and other cities. We have always been able to prevent a good deal of the trouble in the last mentioned place; but in Buffalo a large number of Finnish Socialists were compelled to move away in order to belong to a branch of their own language.

If it is better and absolutely necessary for the welfare of the Socialist Party to organize by districts, whether county, assembly, senatorial, or any other, the foreign-speaking Socialists ought to have the right to form locals of their own language, thus giving them an opportunity to utter their opinions in the field of Socialism.

In such a case we recommend as a sample the organizing plan of the local of New York City. There is an article in its constitution providing that members desiring to transact their business in a language other than English have the right to form separate branches. this solves the whole problem and benefits both sides.

Organization Grows Strong.

The Finnish Socialists who are heralding greater solidarity and better cooperation among the non-English-speaking foreigners in the United States today come from the movement among the Finnish population in this country that is not the same trembling, weak organization that it was a short time ago. Prior to the year 1904 there were two different leagues of Finnish workingmen, each supported by several branches in different localities and states.

The two organizations, however, did not satisfy even their own members, who found that they were not on the right track, and that the opportunities for the work in hand were thereby limited. At least, with two organizations there was no hope of accomplishing the best results.

The sentiment favoring one organization grew rapidly, as did the desire for direct affiliation with the Socialist Party of America. This proposition, however, raised considerable discussion when it was learned that the Finnish organization as a whole could not join with the party.

Plan is Offered.

It was claimed that each Finnish branch or local connected with its respective county or state organization would disperse and abandon the lines of nationality, which some advocated, and it was recognized and acknowledged by both societies that because they did not understand the language of the country, and their inability to express themselves in the English tongue, would disfranchise the Finns of their privileges as party members, and prevent them from taking a part in the party affairs.

But the spirit of "Workers of the World, Unite!" rose above all principles; and with this as a basis all objections were considered and weighed in an effort to overcome them one way or another. In the year 1904, at the first Finnish Socialist convention at Cleveland, Ohio [First Convention of Finnish Workers' Groups, Oct. 3-5, 1904], a

resolution was adopted calling for the affiliation of each and every local with their respective county and state organization.

The activity in the year 1905 showed much progress. New branches were organized and those already in existence filed their applications with their respective party organizations. The necessity of improving the methods and laying the plans for carrying on the propaganda work was realized by the members, and in spite of the financial difficulties the second convention was called together at Hibbing, Minnesota, in August 1906.

This convention was well attended and the basis of the present Finnish National Socialist Organization [*Yhdysvaltain Suomalainen Sosialistjärjestö* — United States Finnish Socialist Organization] was founded and suggestions relating to the ways and means of the organization set forth by that convention.

Hire Translator.

The activity of the Finnish Socialists and the difficulties in the language compelled them to hire someone to do the translating. This was tried in the states of Minnesota, Michigan, and Wisconsin, and on this practical knowledge was brought up the idea of establishing a national Finnish translator's office for the benefit of every Finnish branch in the country, and locating the same at the national headquarters of the Socialist Party.

A committee was elected at the convention to make the arrangements with the National Executive Committee and with its permission the national Finnish translator's office was started at the national headquarters on Jan. 1, 1907.

The Finnish organization contained 53 locals or branches, representing a membership of something over 2,000, and during the year 1907 the number of branches increased nearly 93 percent, and at the end of the same year showed an increase in the membership of 75 percent. At the convention of the National Finnish Socialist Organization at Hancock, Michigan, August 23-30, last year, National Secretary Victor Watia reported that there are now 162 locals of the organization.

Locals Grow Stronger.

The 53 locals had a membership of 2,500, while the 162 locals now have a membership of 5,183. The receipts of the national Finnish office from Jan. 1, 1907 to August 16, 1909, were \$26,358.51. The expenses for the same period were \$23,561.32.

The National Finnish Organization is conducted by an Executive Committee of five members, who are elected yearly by a referendum vote; a General Committee, in which each state is represented according to the number of locals, and by referendum of the membership.

All the propositions regarding the Finnish organizations exclusively are transacted through the national, also known as the "Translator's" office, but in compliance with the rules of the Socialist Party all party affairs are conducted systematically by the various county and state offices.

In this manner the Finnish party organizations are conducted in accordance to the constitution and the work done separately, each organization working in its proper sphere. For agitation and organization purposes the country has been divided into three organization districts, and a steady organizer is kept in the field in each district.

A number of books and leaflets have been distributed through the national (Translator's) office, and the party constitution, platforms, and all national, state, and county matters have been translated from English to Finnish, and propositions from the locals for county, state, or national office transposed into English.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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