
Correspondence Relating to the Application of the South Slavic Federation for Readmission to the Socialist Party of America from Frank Petrich, Secretary [July 1, 1920]

Published in *The Socialist World* [Chicago], v. 1, no. 1 (July 15, 1920), supplement, pp. 3-4.

1. Petrich Cover Letter, July 1, 1920.

Chicago, Ill., July 1, 1920.

To the National Executive Committee.

Dear Comrades:

I herewith submit further correspondence relating to the application from the South Slavic Socialist Federation for affiliation with the Socialist Party:—

2. Petrich to Branstetter, June 26, 1920.

Chicago, June 26, 1920.

Socialist Party of America,
Otto Branstetter, Secretary,
220 S Ashland Blvd., Chicago, Ill.

Dear Comrade:

Thanks for the information you gave me the other day regarding the outcome of the vote on National Executive Committee Motion No. 2, June 1, 1920, relative to the reaffiliation of the South Slavic Federation.

From the comments made in this connection by Comrade Henry and Comrade ONeal, I take it that the question of our reaffiliation might be discussed at

the National Executive Committee meeting July 10, 1920, in Detroit, Michigan, as some further information is needed.

These two comments urged me to write Comrade Henry a letter, of which a copy I am enclosing herewith for your general information.

Besides this, I am willing to appear before any committee that your National Executive Committee may appoint to look into this matter, and will gladly give all information I can. For this purpose I will be on that date in Detroit, Mich.

Fraternally,

Frank Petrich,
Secretary.

3. Petrich to William Henry, June 26, 1920.

Chicago Ill., June 26, 1920.

Dear Comrade Henry:

You will please excuse me for writing you this letter. I would not molest you were it not for the cause of Socialism and the organization I represent.

I have been informed by Comrade Branstetter, Secretary of the Socialist Party, of the outcome of vote on Motion No. 2, June 1, 1920, regarding the reaffiliation of our Federation with the Socialist Party.

I note that among 7 members of your National

Executive Committee voting upon the motion, 1 voted “yes,” 6 “no,” and thus the motion was lost.

I also note your comment and the comment of Comrade Oneal, saying that the question of our reaffiliation will be discussed at your Executive Committee meeting, July 10, 1920, in Detroit, Michigan, as some further information is needed.

Those two comments urged me to write you this letter, thinking that I may be able to add some to the statement already submitted and upon which your committee voted down the question.

Before going any further, allow me to say a few words in regard to Comrade Oneal’s comment.

Comrade Oneal’s comment would imply that the motive of the South Slavic Federation in “supporting the diplomatists and imperialists in a modern war” was solely a support of what was in the war for the diplomatists and imperialists themselves; this, of course, is not so. In like manner the Communists are trying to interpret the political action of the Socialist Party. They, too, say that political action is a bourgeois instrument, and that it serves for their interests only.

In the statement submitted to the National Executive Committee, it is clearly said that “our interests are not those of the Allies”; nevertheless, we sided with them as Marx and Engels did in some previous wars (Marx, for instance, was on the side of the United States in the war with Mexico), which were according to that time no less “modern” and “imperialistic” than the last one. It all depends on what one may call “modern” and what is more — how much of political significance one is willing to attribute to such wars, be it that they are called “modern” or otherwise.

We were against the war then, as we are against it today. But the war came in spite of our opposition. The question then arose what shall be done now, and in questioning ourselves, we could not believe that passivity in such a crisis is a virtue of Socialism; we thought such tactics erroneous because it does not allow to exploit the situation in the best interests of international Socialism. There were many problems the war had to settle — problems in which the working class had interests.

Of course, our thought was wrong because we were in minority — and as a rule the minorities are always “wrong.” But Marx was not wrong when he

sided with the United States against Mexico because the united States did exactly what Marx expected they would do. We were not so lucky as was Marx, because the Allies did not fulfill their promises — and so we are now doubly wrong. But as to the motives — there could be no question that they were socialistic.

As we were wrong in the party, we were endeavoring to be right outside the party. We were sincere.

There were many in the party that thought as we did and stayed in the party; there were individuals and groups who sided and supported the Allies and remained in the Party — not that they sided with the Allies from a socialistic point of view, as Marx and Engels did, but from purely chauvinistic motives; there were others in the party who supported it from purely pacifistic reasons. They were not sincere.

We had in our midst the Croatian section which supported the party against the war — and i believe this was the only sincere support they gave the party since its affiliation with it; otherwise that section never cared for political work the party carried on. They were “revolutionist” only, and therefore they joined the Communists. There were other motives one might justly mention here, but it is of no use. If one would go on analyzing and dissecting all motives that were there cloaked in one way or another, you would hardly think it worthwhile to look for the truest Socialist in the party during the war and after. Surely, the Socialists are only human as the rest of them are — not infallible.

The war, to some extent, is now over. The membership of our Federation, which was grown up in the Party in pre-war times, desires to go back — down to normal — to everyday propaganda, which is so sorely needed. They desire to be useful to the cause they have learned to love and are ready to bear burdens for it. Will the Executive Committee of your party allow them to go back as they desire?

Here is the situation:—

In the Yugoslav field of political activity of the working class, there are now three outstanding thoughts:

1. Straight Socialism;
2. Ultra-radicalism of Communist varieties;
3. Laborism.

The largest part of the Slovenians and Serbians are for straight Socialism of the Socialist Party; the

Croats are leaning to ultra-radicalism of Communists and IWW; a smaller part of Slovenians and Serbians (I am not so sure of the latter ones) are coquetting with the Laborists.

If your National Executive Committee fails to recognize the Federation, then the first, sober element must be considered not only suspended from all straight Socialistic activities, but driven directly into the camp of Laborism on one side, and ultra-radicalism on the other side. The field for a true Socialistic movement among our nationality would thus be wiped out.

But if the Federation becomes again a part of the Socialist Party, the Laborists would become impossible and the ultra-radicals would be checked by a sound political propaganda and education, because the Serbian comrades, who are always mixing with them, would surely help bring about this change.

Comrade Henry, will you please bring these facts to the attention of the rest of the members of the National Executive Committee when it meets in Detroit?

Hoping this letter will be received by you in the spirit in which it was written, and thanking you for whatever help you may be able to give so the situation might be better understood, I am,

Very sincerely yours for Socialism,

Frank Petrich,

Secretary, Yugoslav Socialist Federation.

4. Branstetter to Petrich, July 1, 1920.

July 1, 1920.

Frank Petrich,
3629 W 26th St.,
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Comrade:

I am in receipt of copy of the communication sent to Comrade William H. Henry and same will be presented to the National Executive Committee at its meeting in Detroit commencing July 10th [1920].

I note that you intend to be in Detroit on that date, and the Executive Committee will be very glad to have you appear before them when your application is under consideration.

With best wishes, I am

Fraternally yours,

Otto Branstetter,
Executive Secretary.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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