

The Uninitiated May Become Discouraged: Interview with Elias Tobekin (June 19, 1911)

It is a pleasure to watch the enthusiasm with which the socialists everywhere are working.¹ Of course, differences arise. But there is no use flying off the handle on account of these differences. They can be, and generally are, thrashed out to the advantage of the socialist movement.

And it is well that there is harmony in the movement. There is nothing so hurtful to the Socialist Party as squabbles over little, insignificant things. The uninitiated, who is not familiar with the socialist mind, may easily become discouraged at seeing these squabbles and mistake them for vital disagreements, and then turn away from the socialist movement, using the old argument that the socialists do not agree among themselves.

What about the labor movement?

Socialists must advocate militant unionism, industrial unionism. It is a mistake to fondle trade unionism in the hope of swinging it toward radicalism at some later time. We must consistently advocate industrial unionism, revolutionary unionism.

But there is one thing that we have to guard against in the advocacy of industrial unionism. We must not allow ourselves to be influenced by those advocates of industrial unionism who scoff at political action. We cannot, of course, at this moment designate the proper form, program, and conduct of the industrial union. But it is not necessary. What is essential now is to preach the theory of industrial, or revolutionary unionism, and have the theory take root in the minds of the workers. As to the methods which industrial unionism will pursue we can trust that to the future. The question as to what national body a newly formed industrial union should join will solve itself as soon as the principles of revolutionary unionism have percolated through the minds of the workers, as soon as they are ready to organize along industrial lines.

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The Appeal, he said, has more than a half million circulation now, and what is more, it has harmony and unity in its office.

That does not mean that differences as to policy and tactics do not arise in the *Appeal* office. Differences are bound to arise and should

arise. They make for progress. But they should be settled in the proper manner. In the *Appeal* office we have a way of tackling difficulties and keeping at them until they are thrashed out to the satisfaction of all concerned. We just get together and reason and reason, and then reason some more, until all are satisfied, until all feel that the right course has been taken

This amicable adjustment of difficulties should be adopted wherever possible. The Socialist Party needs all the good, able men it has. And to let a man withdraw from active work on account of some difference that could be settled easily is not a wise course to pursue.

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On Victor Berger and his activity in Congress, Debs looked fondly.

Berger is in a most trying position in a capitalist congress, but he is doing fine. His propaganda work in Congress is of immense value. It helps fix the Socialist Party in the minds of the capitalists' representatives in its true position. Berger has succeeded in impressing upon Congress that socialism is the greatest factor in our national life today.

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Debs spoke with enthusiasm about all the states he had visited.

The socialist movement is everywhere taking hold in great shape, but nowhere is it as strong as in Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania has at all times been a center of the bitterest class conflict. Poverty and ignorance made that state an Eden for financiers like Carnegie, Schwab, Baer, and Frick. Today things have changed. The sentiment has swung around. The people in Pennsylvania are awake and the Socialist Party will reap wonderful results there in the elections this fall.

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¹ This interview took place in Debs's hotel room in Newark, New Jersey, as he was packing to leave.