
What Revolutionary Socialism Means.

by Carl D. Thompson

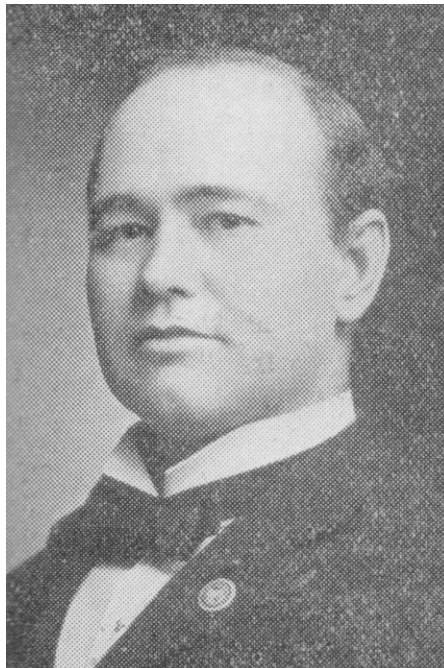
Published in *The Vanguard* [Green Bay, WI], v. 2, no. 2 (Oct. 1903), pp. 13-

Socialism is not a reform, it is a revolution. This is the position held by all scientific Socialists everywhere. But such a statement made without explanation with a non-Socialist or in a lecture to an ordinary audience is certain to be misunderstood. When the word “revolution” is spoken the common run of people think of violence, of bloodshed, of armies and navies. It does not matter what the “scientific” and “dictionary” definition of the term is, common people don’t carry an unabridged dictionary with them as a rule. To use the term without explanation is to get one’s self and one’s cause seriously misunderstood. And sometimes while listening to the speech of Socialists one cannot but feel that they are not always entirely clear themselves as to just what is meant by the expression “revolutionary Socialism.”

And yet we need some designation that shall distinguish us as Socialists from those who merely wish to patch up the present system and keep it. The old parties, every one, and new ones, every day springing up, all claim to be reformers. And they really do advocate reform measures. How, then, can we Socialists distinguish ourselves from them? There is certainly a radical difference. It is to make the point of difference clear and to distinguish sharply between all such programs and Socialism that the Socialists use the term “revolutionary.” We are not “reformers” — we are “revolutionists.”

What, then, is meant by the term?

And first of all, let it be clearly understood everywhere that by revolution Socialists do not mean violence or bloodshed. It is safe to say that every scientific Socialist in the world would regard it a calamity to the cause, as well as to humanity, to have a violent upheaval in society. The



future may see violence and war, as has the past. Our present social problem may involve this nation and others in serious trouble, but it is quite evident that if such should be the case it would be not the result of the teaching of Socialism, but rather the result of the refusal of the rulers to accept the Socialistic program. For Socialism offers a possible, a peaceful solution.

So, then, by “revolutionary Socialism” we do not mean an appeal to arms. We mean by “revolutionary Socialism” the capture of the political powers of the nation by the working class as opposed to the capitalist class. This is the essence of revolutionary Socialism. Whoever sees clearly and holds firmly the necessity of the “organization of the working class and those in sympathy with them into an independent political party, distinct from and opposed to all capitalistic parties to capture

the powers of government” in order to carry out the principles of Socialism; whoever holds this position is a revolutionary Socialist. On the other hand, the one who thinks we are to get Socialism through any of the old political parties, or without organizing a new, Socialist Party, that person is not a revolutionary Socialist and, indeed, it seems to the writer is not a Socialist at all.

“The conquest of political power by a new class, in this lies the essential difference between revolution and reform,” says Karl Kautsky in his new book, *The Social Revolution*:

“Those who repudiate political revolution as the principle means of social transformation, or wish to confine this to such measures as have been granted by the ruling class are social reformers, no matter how much their social ideas may antagonize existing social forms. On the contrary, anyone is a revolutionist who seeks to conquer the political power for an hitherto oppressed class, and he does not lose this character if he prepares and hastens this conquest by social reforms wrested from the ruling classes. It is not the striving after social reforms but the explicit confining of one’s self to them which distinguishes the social reformer from the revolutionist.”†

These are exact and discriminating words, and, it seems to me, state exactly the truly scientific Socialist’s position. And this ought to settle the question as to whether or not one is a revolutionary (and therefore scientific) Socialist. It is not to be decided by the amount of property one owns, or does not own, nor by the kind of clothes he wears, nor by the profession he followed before becoming a Socialist, nor by the kind of religion or irreligion he may profess — but by the very simple and direct question: Does he believe in the independent political party to capture the powers of government by a hitherto oppressed class as a means of securing Socialism? If he does, he is a revolutionary Socialist. And that ends it.

†- Karl Kautsky, *The Social Revolution*. A.M. Simons and May Wood Simons, trans. (Chicago, IL: Charles H. Kerr & Co, [1903]), pp. 8-9.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2005. • Free reproduction permitted.