
The Party and the Future

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Speaking of the Socialist Party of America, and of its failure to become the great opposition party against capitalism during the last 6 years — when seemingly there was such a good chance — we must take into consideration the conditions of this country.

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In order to do justice to the subject, we must remember that until lately we still had colonial conditions prevailing in the United States.

To begin with, there was a great deal of elbow-room for the population. Land was very cheap and to be had on very easy terms. And any man who had the courage and the perseverance to combat with hard, primitive pioneer conditions for a lifetime could obtain a certain amount of independence for himself and a considerable degree of well-being and comfort for his family in the next generation.

A man did not have to remain a factory proletarian in the city, unless he chose to do so.

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And then there was the continuous immigration which enabled the native or the earlier comer to rise upon the heads and shoulders of the later comers, who furnished not only cheap; and abundant labor, but also a considerable market for the products.

At the same time, this *Voelker-Wanderung* (migration of nations) also created a condition in the United States as to multiplicity of races, languages, and religious beliefs, as has not been equaled in any other country since the Biblical story of the building of the Tower of Babel.

In some mines and factories there are as many as 40 different nationalities represented among the workers — all of which makes the “getting together” very difficult.

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Thus a Socialist Party and any radical labor movement had very hard sledding in our country until now.

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Moreover, the World War revived innumerable national prejudices and race hatreds that had slumbered for years. And it created many new ones — for instance, the almost general hatred of other nationals for the German, who suddenly discovered that he was a Hun.

The Jews have also suffered more during the war and since the war than in many hundred years before. And there now is considerable feeling in some places against the Irish, and in many others against the Negro. And the “Pollack,” the “Wop,” and the “Dago” are not particularly popular — all of which goes to show that the World War was the greatest triumph of darkness and reaction in a thousand years.

It did not help the Socialist Party in this country.

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Furthermore, we must not forget that the Socialist Party took a very brave and bold stand at the beginning of the World War and ever since — a posi-

tion in contradiction to all inherited prejudices and conventionalities as taught in school, church, business, and society — pertaining to the value of commercialism, patriotism, imperialism.

These terms the average man hardly knows how to define, let alone being able to comprehend their meaning — yet he is voting and discussing them every day.

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We have in this country more definitely a government of the plutocracy and of the capitalist class than in any other in the world — and the sanctimonious but thievish Wilson administration was more ruthless in the suppression of all Socialistic or liberal ideas and manifestations than any government in every other country at war.

We also lost many of our so-called intellectuals, partly through bribes on the part of the Wilson administration, and partly by intimidation.

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On the other hand this oppression, combined with what happened in Russia, gave cause to the spread of Communistic ideas among the workers, especially those of foreign birth. They despaired of the possibility of solving any social question in America or anywhere else by peaceable means or through the ballot.

They believed in and propagated a bloody revolution patterned after that in Russia.

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Between these two millstones — the upper millstone of the capitalistic government and the nether millstone, the Communists — our party fared ill and got very much the worst of it in almost every place, except in Wisconsin, where we had a fairly good organization and a strong paper.

Under these circumstances it is not surprising that many Socialists and progressive workmen have despaired of bringing about any changes in the political and economic conditions through the Socialist Party — and want to try some new organization.

I can only agree with them to a limited extent.

To begin with, *I am proud of the record of the Socialist Party during the war.* The thousands of indictments and the numberless persecutions of Socialists, I consider just as many leaves of laurel in the wreath rightfully belonging to the party.

The Socialist Party stood up wonderfully against the tyranny of the government and terrorism of the mob.

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The same holds good for our activities in legislative bodies.

The Socialists — and only the Socialists — could be depended upon to stand for all efficient and progressive measures in the Wisconsin legislature and in the various Common Councils. Only the Socialists always introduced and fought for bills to protect labor in all its phases.

All the other parties or groups — no matter how “progressive” — were always uncertain and often dishonest.

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The trouble with the party — besides the conditions that I have enumerated before — was mainly that of “tactics.” We have inherited an impossible and ironclad set of rules that were considered sacred — from the old and defunct Socialist Labor Party. These dogmatic rules have built a Chinese wall around our organization in America, as we find around no other Socialist party in the world.

It was considered an unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost to endorse a candidate of a non-Socialist organization or accept endorsement from a non-Socialist group.

Just as the Jew in the old Roman days would carry around a bundle of hay with him in order to sleep on and thus not be contaminated by the hay of some Heathen — or as the true Mohammedan would not drink wine — thus the orthodox Socialist would disdain to accept an endorsement from the Single Taxers or the Forty-Eighters or the Progressives of any domination.

It was and is actually considered a crime to vote for anybody who is not a regular card member.

The Socialist Party, therefore, remained a sort of

perfectionist sect — with the result that in most places it had a list of “articles of faith” instead of principles, and amounted but to very little.

That must be changed, of course.

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The question is only — with whom are the Socialists to unite and what could we gain if we gave up our own organization?

Only an enemy of the movement or an ignoramus could propose to support Robert M. LaFollette so long as he remains in the Republican Party and acts as a “capper” and a “runner” for that ultra-capitalist political organization — while pretending to be a “liberal” or even a near-Socialist.

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Moreover, LaFollette is responsible for the making of more political crooks under the cover of “progressivism” than any other man in the country, except Teddy Roosevelt. Most of them have not only gone back on the people but also on him.

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And the farmers did not do well in politics.

The Equity Society was a miserable failure in the legislature of Wisconsin, as was also the Non-Partisan League. These legislators helped neither the farmer nor the workingman. With a few exceptions, they had neither brains nor character. The Non-Partisan League is on its last legs even in North Dakota, where it did try to do some useful work.

As for the Labor-Farmer Party — that also failed to make good in the last election. It polled less than one-third of the vote the Socialists did. Its only stronghold in the state of Washington has just gone to pieces.

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Labor parties are not a new phenomenon in this country. They were usually the last hangout of the labor fakir, after all the graft in the economic field had been exhausted.

If our friends in the unions would scan a little

more closely some of the fellows who clamor so loudly for a new labor party, they would plainly see the motive behind the mask.

Thus there can be no question that by fusing with any new combination we would simply be doing the bidding of the capitalist enemies in the state and the nation. We shall never fuse. We must keep our identity.

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On the other hand we will undoubtedly remain a contemptible sect in most places unless we make it possible for the organization to grow and grow big.

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In short, the time has come where the question for the Socialists in the near future will be mainly whether we want to remain outside of active participation in the government of the United States and simply criticize, or whether we intend to build up an organization that will do its part in moulding the policy of the country.

It is, of course, impossible to forecast what the future political complexion will be — whether our people will hold on to a system of two parties, or whether it will revert to a number of groups, as prevail in every other great country — even in England at the present time.

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In England it is possible that there may be again only two parties in the future — but in that case there will be one great bourgeois or conservative party and one great Socialist party.

That Socialist party in England will emerge out of the various labor and radical elements under the leadership of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) — which is the name of the largest Socialist organization there and which, with wonderful sagacity, has taken the lead in crystallizing the modern, progressive, political thought of Great Britain.

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America has imitated the “mother country” more or less in everything.

Let us hope that our people will imitate England also in the formation of the big Socialist party, that must be based upon the trade unions, farmers, and sympathetic intellectuals.

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I say farmers — because in this country we have a very strong agricultural element which is middle class and proletarian at the same time — and must be taken into consideration.

In our country the farmer is radical. The masses, by right, should be radical everywhere. The word radical comes from the Latin word “radix” — meaning “root.” The broad masses are naturally the root of everything in every country.

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As for the intellectuals — the so-called professional men — they will soon be compelled to seek

radical remedies on account of the changing economic conditions in this country, nevertheless so much is very clear that in order to fulfill their mission and to be beneficial to humanity — in order to exist at all — they must be more or less Socialistic.

And to Socialist thought, and Socialist organization — but without rigid and ridiculous “tactics” — will belong the spiritual leadership of the future.

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Therefore, *we must by all means support, strengthen, and uphold our Socialist organization at the present time as well as in the future.* At the same time, however, we must show our willingness to cooperate with any radical group — no matter what its makeup or complexion — that is willing to assist us and to cooperate with us on the political or economic field in our continuous and ceaseless battle against the capitalist system.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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