
At the Parting of the Ways

by Hermon F. Titus

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Unsigned article attributed to editor Hermon Titus.

The almost simultaneous occurrence of two recent incidents has brought the Socialist Party sharply, but not unexpectedly, to the parting of the ways. We say "not unexpectedly" because those who have kept close watch upon party affairs have foreseen that, sooner or later, the party would be confronted with the alternative of continuing along the straight road which a working class Socialist Party must travel in order to achieve its mission, or of taking one of the two roads leading either to the impassable heights of impossibilism or the treacherous mire of opportunism.

The two incidents alluded to are the Berger compromise in Milwaukee and the Hagerty affair at San Francisco, both outrages against the party principles and integrity. In each case the disregard for the fundamental ethics of a revolutionary working class Socialist party is so glaring that left unchecked, the socialist Party would be made unfit for service as the representative party in America of the International Socialist movement.

Party Life at Stake.

The question at issue does not affect Hagerty and Berger so much as individuals as it does the tendencies which they represent; it does not affect the relative merits of industrial unionism or pure and simple trade unionism so much as it affects the very life of the Socialist Party, the party which has been built up by the energy and devotion of the enlightened class-conscious workers of this country. And because the life of the Socialist Party is at stake, it behooves the party members everywhere to awaken to their responsibility and choose which road shall be

taken, now and for all time.

Enough of Impossibilism.

The Socialist movement of America has had enough of impossibilism, whether it come clothed in the garb of a DeLeon, a [Thomas J.] Hagerty, or what else. We have been surfeited by its propaganda of expletives, of misrepresentations, of meaningless mouthings of revolutionary phrases which have almost fallen into disrepute through misuse and distortion.

It has taken years of unceasing labor to overcome some of the ruinous effects of the DeLeon policy, the policy which closed the ears of the organized working class to Socialist agitation and blinded them to the radiance of Socialist truth; the policy, moreover, which sooner or later leads its exponents into the wastes of anarchism. Nothing illustrates this more clearly than the doctrine now being enunciated by DeLeon, Hagerty, et al., to the effect that economic organization of the working class must precede and dominate political organization, a doctrine to which Samuel Gompers and his colleagues can sign their names cheerfully. Indeed, the only difference which now obtains between DeLeon and Gompers is the one of "industrial unionism vs. craft unionism," a question which industrial development and working class intelligence will settle in good time and short order.

Ever since the national convention in Chicago last year [May 1-6, 1904], when he stood in the corridors of the convention hall and sneered at the delegates as "single-taxers" and "middle class sentimentalists," when he tore up his card of membership in the Socialist Party after the adoption of the trade union resolutions which were endorse overwhelmingly after-



wards by the party referendum — ever since that time Thomas J. Hagerty has not hesitated to belittle the efforts of Socialist and deride the party from the public platform. Coming at a time when the possibilist element in the Socialist Party lacked leadership the most, Hagerty provided sufficient ability and activity to give coherence to what is otherwise incoherence personified. In the name of the new industrial union movement he has spread distrust and suspicion of the Socialist Party and its purposes, until he has made fealty to that movement a test of loyalty to what he declaims as Socialism.

Cooperation Wanted — Not Domination.

It is unfortunate for the new industrial union movement that it has had so far for its chief spokesman a second edition of Dan DeLeon. There can be and is an honest difference of opinion among party members regarding the advisability or feasibility of the new movement. That it has some justification for existence no impartial student of the labor movement will deny. That, however, it involves a subjugation of the political movement to the economic one, no So-

cialist worthy of the name will admit. An acceptance of that position leads inevitably to where the Union Labor Party would have led us three years ago — to fusion, compromise, and destruction. Such a position does not admit of cooperation between the political and economic movements, but compels a perversion of the political movement to suit, at any time, the immediate necessities or demands of the industrial movement, a position exemplified in Colorado at the last election and one which no real Socialist will accept without protesting to the limit of his power.

Where Opportunism Leads To.

On the other hand, the acceptance of the position assumed and defended by [Victor] Berger of Milwaukee would land the party into the same predicament. In the final analysis the doctrine of state autonomy carried to the same extreme that possibilism invites, leads to compromise, fusion, and confusion. If the national organization has no right to enforce within a single state observance to the principles of the International Socialist movement, especially the principle of no compromise with capitalism, represented either by a party or by an individual, then there is no national Socialist Party in this country and the sooner we organize one the better.

Compromise Inexcusable.

It is no sufficient reason for compromise to say that an individual represents or does not represent the Catholic church, or any other religious institution. It is no excuse for compromise to say that an individual did or did not at some time support or attack workmen when on strike. The Socialist Party of America is not an anti-clerical party. It is a working class party organized to overthrow capitalism and establish Socialism through and by the exercise of the political power of the working class to that end. If the Catholic church chooses to take up and conduct a fight against Socialism then we must fight back as Socialists through the Socialist Party. If an individual chooses to defend labor or to defeat it, then the acts of that individual must be judged by the Socialist standard, he must be measured by the Socialist rule. Insofar as he represents capitalism, the worldwide enemy of the working class,

let him be so judged and condemned, if need be. But the Socialist Party must represent the movement for Socialism so completely, so honestly, so uncompromisingly that neither the denunciations of any institution thriving through capitalism or the virtues of any individual supporting capitalism will be able to withstand its completeness, its honesty, and its steadfastness to the Socialist faith.

State Autonomy Not the Cause.

But state autonomy is not the cause of compromise, any more than industrial unionism is the cause of impossibilism. State autonomy is but the shield behind which compromise can hide. As the doctrine of states' rights was used to defend and uphold chattel slavery, so can state autonomy in our day be used to cover and bolster up compromise in the Socialist movement. This is, in effect, what is meant by Berger's declaration in his explanation of his editorial endorsing Wallber that the National Committee had no jurisdiction in the matter. No jurisdiction, forsooth, when the most cardinal principle of International Socialism is violated! And yet this is the logical outcome of a policy which gives opportunity to place the interests of a state or locality above the interests of the national or international movement.

How State Autonomy Has Worked.

The state autonomy clause of the national constitution quoted by Berger is in the main the same one inserted in the constitution at the Indianapolis convention in 1901, when unity was finally accomplished. It was written by Berger and only agreed to by the convention in order to prevent any further obstacles to unity. Under the operation of that clause the state organization of Wisconsin has not used the dues stamps furnished by the national headquarters to other states, it has refused to give a list of its locals to the National Office, it has within the past year reminded the national headquarters that the national movement would be better off if Wisconsin paid no dues to the National Office and kept them at home, it refused to publish in its English paper [*The Social Democrat*] the National Committee's call for funds for the last national campaign while receiving at the time special as-

sistance from the National Office, but used the same call in the German paper to raise money for the state campaign fund; and, more than all, it has refused and returned the charter issued to it by the National Committee in 1902, so that today the Wisconsin state organization holds no charter from the national organization, a fact which Berger has not hesitated to proclaim on different occasions, although it did not prevent him from protesting against a charter being granted to Utah because the national constitution was not observed.

If this condition of things has been allowed to go on, it was simply because those in a position to protest preferred to remain quiet rather than do anything that might disturb the progress of the party in or out of Wisconsin. And it is probable this condition would now be tolerated, without protest, had not the logical situation which was bound to develop come to pass at last. Technical violations of the law may be tolerated at certain times but when the offense becomes one of clear, plain abrogation of a vital party principle, then action must be taken that will be more than a protest.

For the Socialist Party members, therefore, there is but one course to take at this critical time, a time more critical than some may perhaps estimate. The proposition is one in which the personalities of Berger or Hagerty or Trautmann, either individually, or in their relations toward each other or their attitude upon the trade union question, cut no essential figure, and this should be kept in mind. The question is: Shall we allow the Socialist Party to be wrecked by compromise either with impossibilists or opportunists, and led by either route to anarchy and disintegration?

For extremes meet in this case as in all others. If the impossibilists stand for anything it is for a species of Socialism which would ultimately make political action impossible, magnify the importance of economic action, and end with the "general strike," the anarchist method of revolution. To follow opportunism, fortified by state autonomy, to its logical conclusion would be to make the state independent of the national organization, the local of the state, and the individual of the local, thus arriving also at individualism, the essence of anarchism, and establishing an affinity between the impossibilist and the opportunist of which they are perhaps both unaware.

Socialist Party Must Go Straight Ahead.

As between these two elements, so unlike in some things, so similar in others, but so sure in their final destination, the Socialist Party has no choice. If it is to fulfill its mission as the party pledged to working class emancipation; if it is not to become a mere makeshift to be used once or twice to meet the opportunity of a moment and then thrown aside; if, in short, it is to continue the Socialist Party, it will go straight ahead, turning neither to the right nor left, tempted neither by the impatient cry of despairing doctrinaires or the illusive phantom of speedy political advantage, but free from both dangers, strong in its own rectitude and sustained by its own patient, unquenchable faith in its own destiny as the party of the working class.

To turn aside now, to condone compromise or fusion in any form, when the high road to Socialist victory has just been entered upon after years of struggle in the thicket, would be to write ourselves down as worse than fools and unfit to carry on the great work entrusted by economic evolution to our hands.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

*Photograph of Thomas J. Hagerty from a 1902 pamphlet published by Standard Publishing Co.
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