

---

# Make-Believe Radicalism

by C.E. Ruthenberg

Letter to the editor of the *Cleveland Citizen*, Sept. 9, 1911.

Editor *Citizen*:

There is no greater danger to the working class than that of being misled by reformers who use radical and revolutionary phrases, but [which do not] result in revolutionary changes in our industrial system. Cleveland during the past 10 years has had bitter experience with reformers and reform measures. Ten years of reform and the radicalism of phrases has not brought the workers of the city nearer emancipation from the grinding yoke of the profit system and 10 years more of another individual reformer will bring no better results.

In his letter refusing to debate with the candidate of the Socialist Party, Mr. Newton D. Baker endeavors to give the impression that the only differences between him and the Socialists are “differences of opinion upon questions of methods rather than questions of principle.”<sup>1</sup> He seeks to make the working class of Cleveland believe that by electing a candidate of the Democratic Party who uses the phrase, “that the workers should receive all they produce,” they will move toward the abolition of exploitation.

The time when revolutionary phrases without revolutionary purpose will deceive the working class is past. Neither Mr. Baker nor any other candidate of the Democratic or the Republican Party can make the men and woken, who often must hunt for many long weeks for the opportunity to work, and when their capitalist masters give them employment are forced to accept as wages a small part of what they produce, believe that the abolition of the profit system, which alone can give to the workers the full product of their toil, can come as the result of a Republican or Democratic victory. The Democratic Party stands for reaction — retrogression. In its platform it has declared

---

<sup>1</sup> The 29-year old C.E. Ruthenberg was himself the jilted candidate of the Socialist Party for Mayor of Cleveland in the November 1911 election, a debate with whom was rejected by Democratic candidate Newton D. Baker.

itself in favor of returning to the days of ruthless competition in place of moving forward to the social revolution. The difference between the principles of the Democratic Party and the Socialist Party could not be greater than the differences now existing. A debate between a Socialist and the candidate of the Democratic Party would soon make these differences apparent, and it is the fear of this, rather than desire not to “obscure the real issue under a debate about forms of propaganda and theoretical party or class distinction,” which dictated Mr. Baker’s refusal.

Even in its own little field of reform the Democratic Party in Cleveland has proven itself unworthy of the confidence of the people at large. When the gas franchise was before the City Council and the Socialist Party was fighting for municipal ownership of the artificial gas plant, the Democratic Party took no action until the gas franchise was certain of passage, and then voted against it for political effect. The Democratic Party and Newton D. Baker are willing that the people’s right to acquire the street railway system at the expiration of the Tayler franchise by paying for the car lines the physical value be sacrifice and the municipality forced to pay \$10 million for franchise value and depreciated property. this amendment to the Tayler franchise has not brought a single word of protest from Mr. Baker and the Democratic Party. On this question alone there seems to be a big difference between the party of radical phrases and the Socialist Party standing for revolutionary action.

The Socialist Party is pledged to a program of revolutionary industrial changes. Its object and aim, the one ideal which animates all its actions, is to build up a working class party which will always hold fast to the one purpose which is the reason for its being, the abolition of the capitalist system. All the struggles must and do tend to this end. There is no other way of winning industrial emancipation of the working class than through a working class party organizing and fighting along the lines of the class struggle. No party with other principles can assure the workers the full product of their toil and the right to employment. The gulf between the Socialist Party and the Democratic Party is entirely too big to be bridged by phrases.

*C.E. Ruthenberg.*

*Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport*

1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR · May 2012 · Non-commercial reproduction permitted.