
The Socialist Party

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The deplorable condition in which we find the Socialist Party calls for a frank and open discussion of its policies, the causes of its impotency, and the changes necessary to be made in order to revive and invigorate it and to make it a power in the labor movement. That the condition is deplorable there is no question. When a great labor organization loses 50 percent of its membership in four years; when, for want of funds, it is compelled to withdraw its organizers from the field; to reduce the amount of cash to be expended in the publication of its literature and to curtail expenses by reducing the force in its National Office, in the face of the needs of the hour; there is something fundamentally wrong with its policies, its method, and its plan of organization.

A great labor organization? Perhaps the Socialist Party is not a great labor organization. Perhaps it is only a quasi-labor organization, with a strong tendency to become ever less and less a labor movement and more and more an intellectual and quasi-religious movement.

As a matter of fact, this intellectual, religious tendency is precisely what is developing in the Socialist Party. It is, as rapidly as possible, developing the spirit of the old Socialist Labor Party. The dominant idea seems no longer to be "What can we do?" but "Is he clear?" The more the former idea is frowned upon and the latter emphasized, the more purely intellectual, idealistic, and fanatical the movement becomes. If persisted in long enough, these ideas will resolve themselves into a toboggan slide, upon which the party will ride backward to its place of beginning. It is now moving rapidly in that direction.

The fundamental weakness of the Socialist Party lies in the fact that it stands alone and without a vital connection with any economic or industrial movement. Its foundation is laid in theories and philosophies. It is a propaganda organization. It is resolving itself into a school, instead of a fighting machine. It seeks to elect officers to carry

out ideas and ideals, rather than to protect interests and develop institutions.

As a purely political organization, acting independent of all industrial and economic movements, the Socialist Party can do but little. The officials elected by the Socialist Party not only have to contend with the officials elected by the other parties, but they also have to contend with the economic and industrial interests of the land with which those officials are vitally connected and by which they are controlled. The officials elected by the other parties are supported by all the economic and industrial power of the country, in their effort to make such rules as will tend to protect and multiply those powers. While the officials of the Socialist Party, representing a purely political organization, strive to enact such rules as may conform to the principles and theories of that organization; were they vitally connected with and controlled by great industrial and economic movements, their efforts would be directed toward enacting such rules as would protect and multiply the power of such movements. The principles and theories of the party would then become manifest as the power of those movements is developed. Without such power being vitally connected with, and having control over it, the Socialist Party never will have power to greatly modify existing institutions.

It is for this reason that the accomplishments of the officials elected by the Socialist Party, with but few exceptions, have been and must continue to be meager and of but slight importance. If the effects of their meager accomplishments would end there, the damage would not be so great. But when the general public, as well as the membership of the party, observe the fact, it turns the public away and strikes palsy in the hearts of the membership.

It is the inherent weakness of the party that is sounding its death knell. Weakness not only begets contempt in the minds of our enemies, but it causes despair in our own minds. If the psychology of despair is developed in the labor movement, disintegration will not only set in but an era of destruction will follow. The development of power alone will inspire the labor movement to inaugurate a constructive political and industrial policy. There is nothing so deadening as a pessimism in the movement. Indeed, pessimism is only a process of decay. All nature is an optimist during its period of growth. It is pessimist when decay sets in. The labor movement and the Socialist Party are not missing links. They are not exceptions. To prevent pessimism and decay, they must develop power. With power comes all

things. It works wonders in the movement. With it comes hope, without which no movement can survive. Hope carries with it a will and a determination to do and a feeling of confidence and fellowship that arouses the fellowship of an organization to its maximum efficiency. Hope is the psychology of success. Despair the psychology of failure. Hope and power go hand in hand to victory. Weakness and despair lead but to the grave. An intellectual, quasi-religious political party, detached from economic and industrial movements, can only develop weakness and despair and end in fanaticism and failure.

A political party can become powerful only in proportion as it is in the hands of and controlled and used by powerful economic and industrial movements. It must be an instrument of warfare in their hands and at their bidding and command at all times. It must not be an idealist movement only; it must also be a fighting machine. It must fight first for immediate interests, and second for ideals. It must be an inseparable part of the industrial and economic movements. The same men, the same interests, the same struggle, first, last, and forever must be involved. This old, one-armed argument must be forgotten. "The unions one arm — the Socialist Party the other arm" is rotten to the core. The only part of the working class worthy of consideration in respect to being a fighting force is the organized portion. The rest is a rope of sand. Only as they are organized are they worth considering as a social factor. Hence a political party is not one arm; but it should be and must be an instrument in the hands of the organized portion of the class, if it is ever to avail the class. A party dominated by non-members of the industrial and economic organizations, however intellectual, can never efficiently aid those organizations. The party must not dominate, nor lead, nor function separately. The economic and industrial movements are inherently vital. In them and their activities are involved the means of subsistence. Out of them arise the advantages, comforts, and luxuries of the class by which they are controlled. Political action is only an instrument of warfare. The strike, the boycott, cooperation, and numerous other means are likewise employed.

A political party must be a practical fighting machine for what the class wants now. What it wants hereafter will come hereafter, if the class gets what it wants now, and not otherwise. The economic and industrial movements must use every available device, means, and method to increase their power. Power is the sole desideration. All things come with it. Hence, whatsoever method, means, or device

multiplies the power of the industrial and economic movements is justifiable, is right, nay, is necessary.

Economic and industrial movements purify themselves in proportion to their action. A movement that delegates its power, political or economic, becomes corrupt. The temptations laid before the agent becomes too great to withstand. If, however, the votes of the movement are bound up with its interests in the same manner and degree as are the strikes and boycotts, and are used and handled by the movement in the same manner and for the same purpose for which the strikes or boycotts are used, then the movement will become as incorruptible in its political activities as it is in its economic activities. It is a well established fact that the labor movement has lost less money by embezzlement or other dishonest means than has any other known organization, not except banks, secret organizations, or churches.

Not only does a movement in action, like running water, purify itself, but it also develops its own program. Just as the water runs downhill and makes its own channel in which to run, so, also, will the industrial and economic organizations seek the line of least resistance and thereby define their line of march. If the movement is in action, it can no more depart from its interests than can water run uphill or the force of gravity cease to operate. There can never be a corruption fund large enough to corrupt a movement, provided the movement is in full charge and directing its activities. The reason is that the interests of every movement are worth more to it than to any other body. Purchases, corrupt or otherwise, are only made with a margin of gain in view. The fear of a corrupt labor party is groundless and without force. How could the capitalists, who are fully in charge of their own political machinery, corruptly enact laws contrary to their own interests? Will the working class do less if their economic and political interests are merged?

It is for this reason that the economic and industrial organizations must form the basis of the successful working class political party of the future.

By the economic and industrial organizations is meant the labor unions, found only in the cities and towns of the land, and the various cooperative enterprises, found not only in the cities and towns, but also throughout the country and farming districts.

The interests of both these movements are substantially identical. Each should largely supply the market for the other's output, by ex-

changing their products upon an agreed basis, while the one would become commissary for the other in times of industrial struggles.

These city and county cooperative enterprises can be so bound up with the labor unions, in their exchanges and in their political activities, that their interests would become absolutely identical.

Each union and each cooperative enterprise, or such members of such organization as may desire, should form a branch of the political party, over which they should have absolute control and whose mission should be to further such measures as would add or tend to add power to these movements. It is plain to see that the psychology of such a political organization would, as at all times it should, be identical with the psychology of the labor unions and the cooperative enterprises. In other words, the three movements would constitute practically one fighting machine, on the alert at every point to protect the interests of the producing classes and to develop their institutions.

The inherent strength of such an organization exists in the fact that both the labor unions and the cooperative enterprises are outgrowths of the capitalist system and by it are forced into action. Individuals, acting alone, are so helpless when confronted with the great industrial and commercial enterprises that they are compelled to join with their fellow men for sheer self-preservation. Though they are, by the burdens they impose, developing the very power that will eventually overthrow them, yet these mercantile and industrial enterprises cannot change their course. Capital knows but one course and that is the accumulation of more capital.

Every dollar accumulated must draw interest, and every dollar of interest drawn must in turn draw interest, until the accumulated profits and interest become an unbearable burden imposed by the few upon the millions. In the meantime, the efficiency of the millions depends upon their industrial, cooperative organizations and the power of their own political party to make them legal institutions.

It is apparent that the vital working force of this political organization would be composed of the members of the unions and the co-operators. Yet arrangements should be made for the admission and participation of men not eligible to the membership of the unions. They would probably find an open door into such enterprises.

Doubtless an organization of this character would insist that all journeymen eligible to membership in any labor union should join such union before he could belong to the political organization. One of the most fruitful sources of discussion in the Socialist Party has

been the fact that anti-union men were admitted to membership. When a strike was called these men would frequently refuse to walk out with the union men or would do worse, namely, take their places on the job. There have been in the organization some genuine scabs. Some of them were doubtless sent into the party by the enemy for no other purpose than to keep the Socialist Party and the labor unions apart. No easier nor more successful method could be employed to divide the two movements than to inject scabs into the Socialist Party. Such a course would be impossible under the character of organization above outlined.

Not only would it be necessary for such a political organization to be very watchful in regard to the interests of these two movements, but in addition thereto the purposes of the movement should be as broad as our national life. A movement of such power would find it necessary to take a reasonable position upon every issue of national importance.

Such a position would have to be taken with a view always to the interest of the labor and cooperative movements. Indeed, no other position would be taken buy the movements themselves. In this fact would lie their safety. Such an organization would enter the fields as do all the European labor and Socialist movements and conduct itself in the sure, practical manner. It would forget its long tedious programs, fixed creeds, and settled catechisms and would prepare its platforms as the needs of the hour demand. Immediate circumstances would utter the call to action. Tickets would be named at the primaries here as they are at the first elections in Europe. At the final elections here, as in Europe, the party would support whomsoever seemed most likely to protect its interests.

I think I hear "fusion" as if it were a crime. This is not fusion, but it is a separate organization, using every available method to increase its power. The labor movement enters into compromises without end, but it does not fuse. On the contrary, an employer cannot belong to it. With all its compromises, its lines are more rigidly drawn in regard to its membership. The unions admit no one to membership whose economic interests conflict with theirs, while the Socialist Party admits men of whatsoever interest or calling and puts them in positions of importance and control. Doubtless intellectuals of any class would be admitted to membership in such party, but with the labor and cooperative movements in control, the intellectuals would be required

to serve and not to dictate. In this position they would become a vital and most useful factor.

Under such an organization no such ridiculous spectacle could be made of the movement as is now being done. On the one hand the Socialist Party is unqualifiedly and unconditionally opposing the preparedness of war theory, while the organized labor movement is supporting it. Were the two organizations one movement, one position would be taken. Better, by far, take either position and be solidly together than to be divided and take two. Time would correct the mistake and its power would remain if the movement is not divided.

It goes without saying that the labor movement, and this includes every phase, is opposed to war. But preparedness is coming and will soon be here. In my humble opinion the movement should announce its opposition to war and to preparedness but facing what is bound to happen, insist that if we must prepare, then let all the citizens be armed.

We should propose and insist that our movement should enter the army not as individuals but as an organization; that we officer our own forces; that we are, if necessary for our country, against all enemies, whether they be foreign or domestic and will take them up against all enemies alike. We would then turn the preparedness theory at least to some extent to our interests.

To say that such a position is untenable is to no purpose. The labor movement in Mexico, now only two or three years old, has not only adopted this course, but has actually carried it out and is now a powerful factor in the affairs of state.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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