
Spargo on Marxian Socialism:

A Review of John Spargo's *Social Democracy Explained*

by James Oneal

Published in *The Call Magazine* [New York], May 19, 1918, pg. 14.

From the preface we gather that this volume is the result of a number of lectures delivered before the beginning of the World War. There is little that is new in the book, and much that is contained in other books by the same writer, yet it is interesting to Socialists because it expresses the views of one who left the Socialist Party. By comparing it with some of the late utterances of Mr. Spargo we get a strange result.

The chapter on the "Marxian Socialist Synthesis" leads the reader to understand that Mr. Spargo is still a Marxian Socialist, and on the whole the Marxian will make few exceptions to his exposition and defense of Marxian views.

The preface to the book was written in January [1918], and he takes care to emphasize that the war has not changed his views, yet in that month and for many months before Mr. Spargo was a member of the nondescript National Party, a miscellaneous collection of near-Socialists, prohibitionists, and reformers of all shades. We wonder what Marx would say if he were alive today of this strange confusion of statement and action.

May 5 of this year [1918] was the 100th Anniversary of the birth of Marx, and on that day — just 4 months after Spargo wrote his preface — he writes of Marx in that militant organ of the proletariat, the *New York Times*, that "the centennial of Marx's birth may be regarded at the same time as the end of Marxian Socialism." So, we have it in his book, that the Marxian synthesis is on the whole sound, and in the *Times* that Marxism has reached the end of its rope.

In addition to this the preface assures us that Mr. Spargo is "still a Socialist and an Internationalist." Nay, more: Mr. Spargo tells us that the "Socialist movement

is undergoing a process of readjustment," and that he finds himself "deeply involved in the struggles incident to that readjustment." No doubt there is a "readjustment" taking place, but a comfortable box at the opera, free access to the *Times*, and association with some of the blackest reactionaries in America would indicate that it is Mr. Spargo that is being "readjusted," though it is a painful process we admit.

That "readjustment" has gone so far that Mr. Spargo could say, through the *Times* on April 7 [1918], that the Socialist Party "has supported every contention of the German Imperial government," and that when the apostate Scheidemann was in this country the year before the war his visit "had for its real object an understanding with prominent members of the Socialist Party on the subject of the attitude to be taken by the party in the event of a war in which Germany would be engaged." Such distortion of the truth is further evidence of how far Mr. Spargo has "readjusted" himself to his new-found bourgeois friends. There are a few former members of the party that we would welcome back later on. The author of this book is not one of them.

The only new theme in the book is the last chapter entitled "Socialism and the Liquor Traffic," in which we are told that the party has for the most part taken a position which "is unsound economically, morally indefensible, and politically suicidal." It is only fair to say that this chapter is well written in favor of Mr. Spargo's well-known views, but it is hardly possible that he has said the last word on the subject, and few would agree that his characterization of the party's attitude is in accord with all the facts.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2011. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.