
Open Letter of Resignation from the Socialist Party

by Allan L. Benson

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Allan L. Benson has severed his connection with the Socialist Party and has become a member of the Social Democratic League of America. His reasons for resigning are stated below. His reason for joining the new league is undoubtedly the fact that the Social Democratic League is, first of all, true to the United States. The statement follows:

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I herewith present my resignation from the Socialist Party to take effect at once. I do so with profound regret. I believe in democracy as applied both to government and industry. But I do not believe in the attitude taken by the party toward the war in what has come to be known as the "St. Louis Resolution." I do not believe in pledging the party to acts of violence. Nor do I regard the belligerents as equally guilty. I know, for instance, that Belgium is not guilty at all and that Germany is guilty of all. I know the government of the United States wages war for neither money nor land, while the government of Germany covets both money and land. I know that Germany, any moment she will accept it, can get a just peace, and I feel that until she will accept a just peace she should be compelled to accept war.

Believing that nothing worse could happen to the world than to be placed under the heel of German imperialism, I sever my relations with a party that nationally places the belligerents upon a parity and, in the state of Wisconsin, recently demanded

the withdrawal of the American army from Europe — a demand which, had it been granted, would have meant the speedy collapse of the Allies.

Nevertheless I do not share the view of those who regard the Socialist Party as “pro-German,” if that term be deemed to indicate a state of mind which desires a German victory. I believe that the rank and file of the Socialist Party, like the rank and file of all other American parties, is essentially American and therefore ardently desirous of the defeat of the Central Powers.

The Socialist Party differs in this, that it has among its leaders an undue percentage of the foreign-born. What is mistaken for pro-Germanism in these men is non-Americanism. By reason of their foreign birth they cannot get the American point of view. All nations look alike to them, while to Americans no nation looks like America, however much they may sometimes criticize it.

These foreign-born leaders mislead the party, not because they desire to, but because they are incapable by reason of their birth of doing otherwise. They cannot feel what Americans feel. And they are assisted by an anarchistic, syndicalistic minority that the party, prior to the war, had always suppressed.

The last suppression of this faction was the beginning of the party's downfall. When the party, by direct vote of the membership, overwhelmingly prohibited the practice of sabotage, the dues-paying membership was 125,000. Pursuing their policy of rule or ruin the syndicalists began work within the party either to capture it or destroy it.

By persistent wrangling and quarreling at party meetings the discouraged and disgusted enough Socialists to bring the party dues-paying membership down to 65,000, where it was at the opening of the 1916 campaign.

Moreover, the syndicalists have contaminated Socialist doctrine by foisting anarchist ideas upon the country as Socialist ideas.

A few men in the party who should have known better have accepted and proclaimed the false doctrine that since “a workman can have no country” it is immaterial to him whether

the country in which he lives, if it be at war, shall be defeated or not.

Such men seem quite unconscious of the fact that this is the doctrine of Proudhon and Bakunin, the anarchists rather than that of Marx the Socialist.

Marx believed that workingmen everywhere had a very real interest in the success of the North in our Civil War, and upon at least one occasion wrote to Lincoln congratulating him upon what he was doing to bring such a victory about.

The present foreign-born leaders of the American Socialist Party, if they had lived during the Civil War, would doubtless have censured Marx for congratulating Lincoln.

For these reasons I now take leave of the Socialist Party a year after I ceased to agree with it. It seemed to me that having been at the head of the national ticket two years ago it was particularly my duty to be patient and see if the party would not right itself. It has not righted itself. I therefore resign as a protest against the foreign-born leadership that blindly believes a non-American policy can be made to appeal to many Americans.

Allan L. Benson.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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