

EDITORIAL

THE FIGHT IN WISCONSIN.

By DANIEL DE LEON

COMRADE Boris Reinstein's report,¹ published last Sunday in these columns, of the interview he recently had with Victor L. Berger in Washington is food for thought, for thought of the nature that not only "broadens the horizon of perception" into the devious ways of politicianism, but dictates tactics.

It has for long transpired from the reports from Wisconsin that the application of the election law to the voting machine tends to make difficult, if not impossible, the rise and recognition of any new political movement as a "political party" with the rights of such. In substance, it seems to amount to this: The voters for a "political party" in existence need to handle only two levers on the voting machine, one lever to "open" the machine, and one to vote his whole ticket, if he so desires; the voters for a political ticket that is not set up by a "political party" in existence have to handle as many levers as they have nominees: no one lever "opens" the machine: instinctively the correct name was given to this condition of things: the machine is said to be "locked"—and locked, indeed, the voting machine is to all such voters: the arduousness of the method, forced upon independent voters, virtually renders the voting machine "locked" to them.

In the general tendency of the bourgeoisie to disfranchise the Working Class, the "locking" of the voting machine against independent political expression seemed natural; and the Socialist Labor Party, which, altho' it had polled over 2,000 votes in Wisconsin, had not reached the requisite percentage to be considered a "political party," did not wonder at the move of "locking" the machine. The Party believed it had to deal with the open foe of Freedom—the bourgeoisie of the State—, and ad-

¹ ["Socialist Party Politicians," by Boris Reinstein, *Daily People*, March 2, 1913. Appended.—R.B.]

dressed itself to combat that. By little and little facts cumulated to justify the suspicion of foul play. Mr. Berger's cynic words: "You see, last time—prior to last election—when the Socialist Labor Party column on the voting machines in Milwaukee was locked, as it should be by law [sic] the S.L.P. vote was much smaller than during the preceding election; it was a mere handful. But this time, when it was not locked, through oversight [!!!] of one of our own comrades in office, it went away up, out of all proportion"—these words remove suspicion by turning suspicion into certainty. The sudden drop of the S.L.P. vote, several years ago, when the machine was first "locked"; and the "mere handful" that vote remained ever since, until the last election, when "one of our own [Mr. Berger's] comrades" committed the "oversight" of not "locking" the machine, whereupon the S.L.P. vote "went away up out of all proportion"; all that series of mysteries is now clear. The voting machine was "locked" in the face of the S.L.P. by, or with the connivance of Mr. Berger's party.

The discovery determines the tactics that the S.L.P. of Wisconsin must take.

The S.L.P. fight in Wisconsin must, obviously, be directed against the Berger Social Democracy. While the Social Democracy of Germany, which the Berger caricature pretends to emulate, is the champion of the freedom of political expression, the Berger caricature is, in Wisconsin, a buffer and fore-post for the bourgeois campaign to muzzle the ballot box—read "voting machine"—an all the more vicious, pernicious, unclean and dangerous a buffer and fore-post because of its piratical assumption, and thereby desecration, of the colors of Socialism—hence a buffer and fore-post athwart only the ruins of which the breath of Freedom can break its way in Wisconsin, before it can reach and attack the citadel of Tyranny.

SOCIALIST PARTY POLITICIANS

SIDELIGHTS ON UNITY, AND ON SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY'S GAINS BY ITS DISFRANCHISING SOCIALIST LABOR PARTY VOTERS IN WISCONSIN.

By Boris Reinstein, Buffalo, N.Y.

I read in the *Daily People* of last Sunday, Feb. 23, the article on the complete Socialist Labor Party vote in Wisconsin, supplementing the statement of the Wisconsin State Executive Committee of the Socialist Labor Party, anent the manoeuvres of the politicians against the Socialist Labor Party vote in that state.

It may interest our comrades, especially our Wisconsin comrades, to learn what experience I had with the chief leader of the Socialist Party, Victor L. Berger, with regard to the unity question, and what effect the policy of our Milwaukee comrades of not running an opposition candidate against Berger in the last Congressional campaign had upon Berger.

Last May, while attending as reporter of the *Daily People*, the national convention of the Socialist Party at Indianapolis, I was approached by Carl Minkley, a former Socialist Labor Party man in Milwaukee, now state organizer of the Social Democratic Party (S.P.) of Wisconsin. We renewed old acquaintance and discussed different incidents and developments of the convention. Through Minkley I got acquainted with Berger, with whom we had some brief chats about different matters, especially about the big issue before the convention,

namely, Haywoodism and Anarchy. Berger repeatedly expressed himself as being in full accord with the fight the Socialist Labor Party was waging all these years against the Bummery. During these chats he also expressed his regrets that the Socialist Labor Party was not working together with the Socialist Party, and on one occasion remarked: "Of course you fellows will not run any candidate against ours this year?"

My answer was: "What are you talking about? At this very moment our comrades in different states are busy making arrangements to put our own candidates in the field, and we expect to have our candidates in more than the twenty states we covered two years ago." Berger remarked—and he was comical enough to mean it seriously, "Well, you will have to withdraw your candidates!" I laughed and told him that so long as the parties remained divided that would be out of question.

As our conversation was interrupted at that turn I gave him through Minkley,—Berger himself being otherwise occupied—an outline of the conditions on which such co-operation of the Socialist Party and Socialist Labor Party forces, as he so urgently

expressed a wish for, could be brought about, namely on the basis of the official Unity Memorial adopted by the Socialist Labor Party two years ago, wherein the Socialist Labor Party, though scattered over different states, retained control over its own membership as the present state organizations of the Socialist Party are doing, and, like the latter, have a voice in the councils of the united party in proportion to its own membership.

Minkley expressed approval of the plan. Berger, though hesitating on account of the numerical disproportion of the two forces and the change in the prevailing organization form of the Socialist Party it would involve, as far as the Socialist Labor Party division of the Party would be concerned, still thought that these obstacles were not important enough to make the amalgamation of the two parties impossible. He intended to introduce at the convention a resolution for a Unity conference on that basis, but, as he later told me, decided to bring the matter rather before the National Executive Committee than before the convention of the party, in view of the rush work at the closing days of the convention.

Immediately upon adjournment of the convention on Saturday evening, three of the seven members of the National Executive Committee—Hillquit, Alexander Irvine and Job Harriman—left Indianapolis, only the rump of the National Executive Committee remaining, Berger, Spargo, Kate O'Hare, and Haywood. This rump had a session the next day and considered different business. Berger informed me he brought up the matter informally at that rump meeting.

As it was expected, Haywood was violently opposed to anything that looked like unity of any kind with the Socialist Labor Party, the other two members were also either opposed or not much in favor of a unity conference. Berger, however, after that meeting, still expressed himself as both desirous and hopeful of bringing about the amalgamation of the two parties, though he saw in the Socialist Labor Party only "fanatics," "doctrinaires," "impossibilists," etc. Thus matters stood at the close of the Socialist Party convention.

Now, eight months later, while in New York attending the January session of our National Executive Committee and subsequently working in the tailor strike field, I had occasion to run down to Washington, D.C. While there, I spent a half hour visiting Berger in his office in the House Office Building. The conversation dwelt on the garment workers' strike, the Haywood and direct action trouble in the Socialist Party, and the relation between the Socialist Party and the Socialist Labor Party.

I found that, now that the National and Congressional campaigns had passed, Berger was more indifferent to the change in the relations between the two parties. I gained clearly the impression that Berger considered the question of unity from the standpoint of its effect, not upon the advancement of the general cause of Socialism, but upon the immediate successes and victories of the Socialist Party. And Berger in that regard evidently typifies practically the whole of the officialdom of the Socialist Party. If he saw that the co-operation of the two parties would change the result of the election, in this or that Congressional

district from defeat for the Socialist Party to victory, he would be decidedly for unity. So long as he does not find the Socialist Labor Party to be much “in the way” politically he “does not care,” no matter how demoralising the public feud of the two parties in the political arena otherwise may be.

When we came to speak on the recent campaign in Milwaukee he clearly showed that he did not think very much of our comrades in Milwaukee, although they did not run anybody against him in his Congressional district. Nor did he entertain a high opinion of some of the voters of his own Social Democratic Party, for he tried—with a sober face—to make believe that the nearly two thousand votes cast for our state candidates in Milwaukee were cast by his Social Democratic Party followers “by mistake” (!), when everyone who has any experience at all in such matters knows full well that for one Socialist Party vote that may be cast “by mistake” for the Socialist Labor Party there are at least a half-dozen Socialist Labor Party votes that are credited to the Socialist Party.

While trying to explain to me the cause of such numerous “mistakes” on the part of his Social Democratic Party followers, Berger told me—again with an innocent face, not to say cynically, “You see, last time—prior to last election—when the Socialist Labor Party column on the voting machine in Milwaukee was locked, as it should be by law (?), the Socialist Labor Party vote was much smaller than during the preceding election; it was a mere handful. But this time, when it was not locked, through oversight (?) of one of our own

comrades in office, it went away up, out of all proportion.” And it was clearly evident that such “oversight” would not happen again if Berger could help it.

While he was developing this “argument,” I was studying his face and was at a loss to decide, which it was that “took the cake;” whether it was the silliness in supposing that in Milwaukee, where the Social Democratic Party is so many years on the ballot and is so well advertised by both the capitalist and the Social Democratic Party press, some seventeen hundred voters could “by mistake” turn their backs on the noisy Social Democratic Party and wander into the out-of-the-way column of the little, quiet Socialist Labor Party; or whether it was the brazenness for a “champion of Socialism” cynically to admit that his party—the advocate of free (?) and universal (?) suffrage—was bent on “locking out on the machine” or brutally disfranchising Socialist Labor Party voters.

Anyhow, our Milwaukee and Wisconsin comrades will do well to be on their guard against such “innocent practices” of Berger and his lieutenants. They must do all in their power to make such wholesale disfranchisement in the future impossible.

And our comrades elsewhere, especially those who desire to see political unity of Socialists in America realized, should understand that this is only one more experience, in addition to many other similar ones, demonstrating that, as far at least as the bulk of Socialist Party leadership is concerned, we have to deal with men who are “practical politicians” more than they are Socialists; that they can have respect and appreciation not for men who—no matter how lofty their mo-

tives—accommodatingly go out of their way, but who manfully stand by their guns,

and, while the fight is on, give them all the fight they are looking for.

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Uploaded December 2014

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