
Restoring Confidence: A Letter to the Editor of *The American Socialist*, July 3, 1915.

by John M. Work

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Two great obstacles have been hampering the Socialist movement of the United States.

One of them is scatteration.

This difficulty has been with us from the start. It cannot be remedied all at once, because it arises out of the crass individualism of the people of this country, which permeates the Socialists and causes them to foster private enterprises and to look askance at collective activity. We have just got to grow out of it gradually.

The other great obstacle is want of confidence. This began in 1912. It is largely responsible for the loss of membership.

In 1912, the National Convention put through several reactionary amendments to the national constitution. This was carried still farther by the National Committee meeting of [May] 1914. In fact, there has scarcely ever been a National Convention or National Committee meeting that did not initiate one or more amendments decreasing the democracy of the movement.

Many of us have persistently opposed this tendency. Sometimes, between meetings, we undid the damage by putting through a referendum. Recently, our arguments have been unavailing.

But there was one big silent argument which convinced the recent National Committee meeting [Chicago: May 9-14, 1915] that something must be done to restore confidence.

That argument was the falling membership.

We can afford almost anything but that.

We can, for example, afford to hire an extra girl to keep track of referendums in the National Office.

With this new hunch, the National Committee did four commendable things in the way of increasing

the democracy of the movement.

It proposed a decrease in the number of members required to initiate referendums.

It proposed a decrease in the number of members required to initiate amendments to the constitution.

It proposed that the Executive Secretary be elected by the membership.

It proposed that the Executive Committee be elected by the membership.

I say that all of these are commendable, as being in the right direction, although there are some of them which, in my opinion, need further fixing.

There is no reason why it should be made more difficult to amend the constitution than to initiate any other referendum. The percentage should be the same. To make it higher is a survival of the old idea that a constitution is a fetish to which we must kowtow.

It is absurd to take two ballots for Executive Committeemen. The sensible way is to use the preferential system, whereby the exact will of the membership can be registered with one ballot.

The Executive Committee should consist of the Executive Secretary and the heads of departments in the National Office. We shall never have a really efficient Executive Committee until such is the case. Why? Because the members of the committee, as at present constituted, are not familiar with the needs of the office. They could still be elected by the membership.

But I am skating close to the word limit, and I shall have to leave that subject for future discussion.

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Chicago.

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