
Organization.

by Dan Hogan

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For nearly a score of years, ever since my brief period of revolutionary adolescence, I have been an earnest student of working class organization.

During the last 5 years the subject has been the last I considered before falling asleep and the first to receive my attention in the morning.

With respect to the ultimate common acceptance of the principles of Socialist I have never entertained a doubt, because all the economic and political forces were pointing in our direction. Those individual and organized efforts raised against us have really operated in our favor.

But with the matter of our organized effectiveness and our consequent ability to take care of an incoherent and disorganized temperament — with our ability to democratically direct and control our movement when it shall have reached its high tide of popular manifestation — upon this point I have always suffered the most serious doubts.

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Let no one suspect that I am unwilling that the future of the workers should be entrusted to the workers, for, if organized, the workers are invincible. But where is the organization?

Until recently, very recently, I have groped blindly, hoping that out of the heart and social consciousness of the working class would be born an idea, an impulse, which would clarify the atmosphere and pave the way for the laying of the cornerstone of the real structure, the beginning and the building of which means so much to the working class.

Now, even at this moment, I see clearly, and am for the first time publicly submitting my ideas to the membership of the Socialist Party.

To state the situation:

We have approximately 2 million socialists in the United States. I arrive at this figure from the counted vote cast in the last election, a large percent of votes cast but not counted, especially in the South, the very large number disfranchised on account of sex, race, residence restrictions, and other capitalist “safeguards” thrown around the ballot.

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Of these 2 million people, less than 100,000, or 5 percent, are dues paying members of the party.

Of the 100,000 who pay dues, less than 10 percent take part in the actual government of the party. Note the total vote cast on the last national referendum.†

Under the present system, our sole reliance in the matter of organization, not 1 in each 100 locals organized “stick.” Socialists meet and organize; that is to say, elect secretaries and appoint two or three committees and afterwards make several futile efforts to meet again. After 2 or 3 months they are not heard from. Thus hundreds of thousands of locals have been “organized” and but a few thousand have “stuck.” The ration of socialists to organizations is constantly changing with the percentage of dues paying members on the continual decline.

The situation as above outlined, is not exaggerated nor in any way overdrawn. It would be well, dear

†- Reference is to Referendum A, 1915, which approved 17 seriatim changes to the constitution of the Socialist Party of America proposed by the National Committee at its May 1915 meeting. Just more than 11,000 ballots were cast; total number of dues paying members for the year was actually in the ballpark of 80,000 (not 100,000, as Hogan asserts). Thus, something like 14% of the party cast ballots in the referendum — not the “less than 10 percent” claimed by Hogan.

comrade, to go back and read the four preceding paragraphs again, even though they make you feel unpleasant and uncomfortable.

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Why this condition?

Surely there can be no well grounded, reading, thinking, reasoning Socialist who does not know that WE MUST ORGANIZE, and we must also know that if organized (?) in the present form we are still so loosely connected, so inadequately combined, so listlessly incoherent, that for any great and signal undertaking, where the strength of the movement would be called into action, we would prove a dismal and frightful failure.

Why would we be?

Simply because we have come to regard the Socialist movement as a pure and simple political party and appealing to mankind upon purely political grounds. We GRADUATE our members in 2 or 3 months and they QUIT. Having learned to vote right, and that is all we think and talk about, they very readily conclude that it is useless to pay dues or attend meetings. They think that all they have to do is wait for election day to come and go and vote for Socialism, and in this way Socialism will someday be ushered in.

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The failure of socialists to pay dues is NOT a question of poverty. There are months, I grant you, when it would appear impossible to pay 25 cents, but there never was a socialist who could not during any given year pay \$3 or even \$5. The failure of the membership to pay is due to another cause. Let us see if it can be explained.

As socialists we teach — it is part of our philosophy — that the lives and conduct of men and women are governed by their economic interests, and we think we meet this principle when we point to the

economic gain, the material reward involved in securing the establishment of the Cooperative Commonwealth. But hundreds of thousands of our comrades have come to regard the Cooperative Commonwealth much like Christians regard their “mansions in the sky.” Other thousands of us know that the Cooperative Commonwealth to be must be built; not by the magic of wishing but by the brain and brawn of the workers. And since they see no tangible manifestation of a forward movement in that direction they are not on the job. There are tons of theory, but not an ounce of practice. There is an infinite amount of work to be done, but nothing doing.

Here are 2 million socialists earnestly desiring, praying, and willing to work for the Cooperative Commonwealth, and these comprise the most real, the greatest fraternity on the face of the earth. And yet this fraternity has no expression, no coherent and tangible manifestation. The word “comrade” which should express worldwide brotherhood, stronger than the blood ties of the most sacred relationship, means no more than “here is a fellow who votes like I do.”

There are hundreds of thousands of Masons, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, Red Men, Owls, Eagles, Moose, Woodmen, Foresters, etc., who are also socialists. They pay lodge dues. They attend their lodge meetings. They do not plead poverty in that regard, but they are too poor and too busy to pay dues in the Socialist Party and attend local meetings. All will agree that in the ultimate the latter is MORE important, but they attend to the one and neglect the other. Do not blame them. Look at our own teaching — our own philosophy — for the reason, for the answer. MEN AND WOMEN ARE GOVERNED BY THEIR OWN ECONOMIC INTERESTS. They keep up their lodges and fail to keep up the Socialist movement for the reason that the lodges and fraternal orders serve their *immediate* economic interests. Their lodges and fraternal orders supply and offer a *necessary* function and fulfillment of their economic and *social desires*.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.

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