
Red Party Leaders Have Death Bed Conversion: Frantically Profess They are for President Wilson's War Aims — Moved by Events in Europe Rather than Loyalty to America

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The Socialist Party politicians, frightened by the political damnation that looms directly ahead, are frantically protesting their conversion to President Wilson's war aims. The officials of the party are still stubborn and defy the membership to blast out the German gun bases erected at St. Louis. The excuse for this attitude is that since the sedition law has been enacted [c. June 1, 1918], those who favor the St. Louis platform cannot express themselves freely.

It requires some explanation to grasp the colossal impudence of this position. It is another way of saying: "We took advantage of its thoughtless liberality to stab this nation in the back while it was facing its greatest crisis. To do this we betrayed democracy, socialism, and freedom of speech [so] as to compel special restrictions upon those traditional liberties. Now you, whom we especially betrayed, must not ask to escape from this trap into which we led you, because if you do, we cannot defend our position without breaking the law. This would subject us to the same danger as that into which we led you by the St. Louis platform and which has already subjected so

¹ Algje Martin Simons (1870-1950), for many years a journalist and editor of the Socialist press, was never a Socialist Party functionary holding the title of "Secretary." Simons was a bitter opponent of the 1917 St. Louis Resolution, denouncing the party in an April 17, 1917 letter to Senator Paul O. Hastings, for which he was expelled on May 23. He went on to become the head of the literature department of the Wisconsin Loyalty Legion and was a paid state organizer of the Wisconsin Defense League later in 1917.

many of you to punishment. So you must continue under that platform as continuous sharers in our crime which you now wish to repudiate.”²

That a party that once claimed to be radically democratic can endure this example of insolent Prussianism on the part of its officials supplies the really unnecessary final proof that death is crowding and compelling conversion and repentance. The character of the repentance removes all regrets from the departure. The arguments for a reversal of attitude are all based upon reasons outside America.

It is because Russian democracy has been destroyed, not because American lives were taken or American institutions attacked or American democracy threatened that war is now justified.

It is because Finnish socialism was crushed by Prussian treachery and Palestine opened to Zionism by British armies, that socialists, living in America, are turning against Germany.

These are all good reasons for fighting Germany, but an American political party that moves only when European national interests are outraged is, to put it as generously as possible, not a proper political organ to carry out a constructive American program.

This position rouses the suspicion that the repentance and reformation are not wholeheartedly sincere. This suspicion becomes a certainty when the proposed new tactics are examined.

Some phases of this new alignment are as dangerous as the old position. So mechanical is the mind of the Prussian that it is easy to forecast its operations. The close of this present desperate drive for military victory on the Western front is to be followed by a desperate final drive for a German peace. In that drive, as in previous ones, the International Socialist movement will be used and the American Socialist Party will be expected to supply the “shock troops.”

Preparation has been made with true Prussian thoroughness and insolent bungling. The peace troops have had their period of rest. While armed victory lures, Germany is not interested in ease talk.

But the plan of the peace campaign is ready. To the International Socialist movement has been assigned the task of disruption by an inter-belligerent conference of socialists. This was tried at Stockholm [Third Zimmerwald Conference, Sept. 5-12, 1917] and only the re-

² As demonstrated by the nearly 2-to-1 referendum vote endorsing the expulsion the popular figure of Minneapolis Mayor Thomas Van Lear for his public refutation of the St. Louis resolution, there is no evidence that pro-war forces in the Socialist Party were anything but a small minority, contrary to Simons' intimation.

fusal of organized seamen to ride upon the boats carrying delegates and of the United States to grant passports to the so-called “American” delegates foiled the scheme.

The plans are now more carefully laid. The French “defeatists” were able at the Inter-Allied Socialist Conference in London [Feb. 20-24, 1918] to secure the endorsement of such a conference with German socialists. This endorsement was hitched onto the really remarkable program of reconstruction and peace terms — the latter practically identical with those laid down by President Wilson.

This program manifestly cannot be obtained except by complete defeat of Germany. But the “peace without victory” socialists, who are working closely with the American Socialist Party and have never failed to further German objects in the war, care nothing for this program. They scarcely mention it in their press. All that they asked for was an endorsement of an International Socialist conference with Germans and Austrians.

The pro-German Socialist Party machine in this country is playing its part in this plan. Its press and discredited leaders are urging such a conference to which they would try to send the same utterly anti-American and pro-German delegates that were previously proposed.

To accomplish this end they will sacrifice everything else. And those socialists who are now professing a sudden conversion to President Wilson’s war aims are consciously or unconsciously swallowing the inter-belligerent hook conference along with the war program bait.

This is the most dangerous phase of the coming peace offensive. Only the American Federation of Labor seems awake to this fact and it is fighting every proposal for a meeting with Germans while the war lasts. The American Federation of Labor rightly takes the position that in a democratic country, especially in time of war, the nation represents the people and must be influenced by democratic means within the nation and not by intrigue with enemies outside.

It is this position that furnishes the touchstone with which to test the genuineness of the deathbed of the Socialist Party, and when that conversion is struck by this test it gives off the hollow ring of a spiked helmet.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport

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