
Mob Law and Civil Rights.

Statement of the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party of America, December 1919.

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The Socialist Party of the United States, through its National Executive Committee, calls attention to the amazing assertion of extralegal power in many communities by certain private organizations. Without any warrant in law, or any sanction of state and federal constitutions, these bodies presume to exercise veto powers over mayors, police departments, and public officials in general. Union meetings have been dispersed and amnesty meetings have been prohibited by these private organizations. These bodies constitute themselves a dictatorship over the civil authorities. Mayors and police officials have accepted orders from the American Legion; they have revoked their own orders at its command; they have made the constitution a "scrap of paper," and allowed the American Legion to serve as an upper chamber with veto power over city and state executives.

This organization has prevented or suppressed meetings at Reading and Philadelphia, Pa.; Muncie, Elwood, Anderson, and Lafayette, Ind.; Lynn, Mass.; Bridgeport, Conn., and many other cities. Its latest act of suppression is the attempted dispersal of the Committee of Forty-Eight meeting in St. Louis.

Newspapers have aided and abetted this terrorism in the name of "patriotism" or "Americanism." Editorials and news articles have been employed to whip the masses into a hysteria, preparing the way for illegal acts of the Legion, and attempting to cow those who resent its violence.

Newspapers justify this violence from day to day. Many such publications have become organs of privileged violence and are guilty of treachery to the best traditions of the United States.

This amazing situation, acquiesced in by many public officials who take oath to enforce the constitution, has created a privileged mob in the American Legion, whose will is made superior to constitutions and statutes. It is practically given a mandate over the opinions of all citizens with the power to revoke permits for public meetings under the threat of using violence if its will is not obeyed. Scores of communities have been terrorized and in some cases bloodshed has only been averted by organizations temporarily abandoning their meetings. The American Legion, led in the main by ex-Army officers who formulate the policies of the inarticulate membership, commit the latter to a dictatorship which means the suppression of all independent opinions and the usurpation of civil powers.

The ascendancy of military cliques over the civil powers in Germany and other countries has been a curse under which millions have groaned for generations. This usurpation in the United States is a shame, a disgrace, and an outrage, and if continued means the complete disappearance of any independent intellectual life in this country, and the rise of a cowardly race of slaves. If this dictatorship by the American Legion is to continue, it were better that city executives, legisla-

tive bodies, and police departments should surrender their powers and transfer them to the small cliques who determine the policies of the local Posts of the Legion.

We believe that on the whole the workingmen, who constitute the bulk of the membership of the American Legion, are not responsible for the mob rule of the local Posts. Officered largely by businessmen, corporation attorneys, and a few professional men and their sons, this mob rule represents the profiteers or their professional agents, who piled up fortunes while the workers were serving for meager pay. These Legion officers seek the support of the business and capitalist classes in their campaign of violence and usurpation of power. This campaign is directed against the organizations of the workers, the Socialist Party, and all other labor groups that seek through educational means to inform the masses of the grave problems that confront them.

Without free discussion of all social, economic, and political questions no peaceable solution can be found, while it is certain that the intelligent thinking masses will not submit to a dictatorship of businessmen, bankers, corporation lawyers, and capitalists.

If opinions are sound no amount of free discussion will disprove them. If opinions are false the mailed fist of illegal cliques can never force them on unwilling masses. If these groups believed their opinions sound they would not resort to violence; they would welcome the wid-

est and freest discussion. The “patriotism” which must be enforced by violence and usurpation is a fraud and a sham and deserves only the contempt of honest men.

Speaking in behalf of the Socialist Party and millions of other people, in defense of orderly and civilized processes of free assembly, which semi-militarist cliques are trying to crush, we pronounce the brazen acts of these groups, and the newspapers which approve them, as subversive of the best traditions in American history and a menace to the future security and freedom of the organized workers of this country.

We protest against the violation of their oaths of office by those public officials who acquiesce in this usurpation and violence. We call upon the organized workers, and all other citizens conscious of this menace to intellectual and civil security, to protest against this privileged violence and mob rule, this dictatorship and usurpation of power, which are committed in defiance of them, and which, if unchecked, will lead to chaos, civil strife, community hatreds, and social disaster.

An end to self-constituted upper chambers exercising arbitrary veto powers over public officials! And end to minority cliques who seek to gag their fellows and establish their will as a rule of law to be observed by all!

*National Executive Committee,
Socialist Party.*