
A Plea for the Unity of American Socialists.

Address to a Mass Meeting of Chicago Socialists, Nov. 18, 1900.

by George D. Herron

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There has never come to socialism so plain an opportunity as that now offered by the American political situation. We have reached the psychological moment when socialists may define the issues of life and death for the nation. A united and harmonious socialist movement may now make clear to all the people the lines of conflict between capitalism and socialism; between despotism and liberty. These lines of conflict may be made so definite that no party of compromise or tinkering can enter the political field. Now is the time of socialist salvation, if we are great enough to respond to the greatness of our opportunity.

Nothing outside of socialism can defeat it; capitalism cannot defeat socialism, any more than it can defeat the law of gravity, or obstruct the progress of the seasons. It lies not in the power of capitalistic governments, or capitalistic laws, or capitalistic standing armies, or capitalistic religions, to withstand the socialist evolution and freedom of society. A united and harmonious socialist movement has the push of all the centuries behind it, and the human future for its own. But socialists themselves, by their want of noble unity and concerted action, may put off the cooperative commonwealth and prolong the suffering of the world's disinherited for a generation, or a century. And only by a factional and divided socialist movement can socialism be defeated.

Let us look at our political situation, that we may



see what we have to prepare for. The breakup of the Democratic Party, and its reorganization upon strictly capitalistic lines, is inevitable. The party will be captured by what is called the old-line Democracy, represented by such men as Mr. Cleveland, Mr. Whitney, and Mr. Hill. It will become merely an opposition capitalistic party, to alternate with the Republican or constructive capitalistic party in the possession of power. It will then make no sort of difference to capitalists, or to the working class either, whether the Republican or the Democratic Party be in control of government; for capitalism will be in possession of both parties. The perpetuity of the capitalist system depends upon its having two political parties, about equally matched, to play off against each other, and to shuttlecock the proletariat behind blind issues. American political campaigns have long been a sort of Punch and Judy show; and it has been all one to the working man, whether he was looking at Republican Punch or Democratic Judy. The strings of both parties were in the capitalists' hands. As evidence of this, you will only need to read the recent editorial of representative Republican newspapers, expressing most anxious solicitude as to the reorganization and purity of the Democratic Party, with wise propositions as to its necessity for the development and protection of our institutions.

Now what will happen as the result of this organization of the Democratic Party upon openly capital-

istic lines? A very large portion of Democratic voters supported Mr. Bryan, not because they wanted him, but as a political makeshift. He was really wanted by neither the conservative nor the radical Democracy. His negative position made him unacceptable to old-line Democrats, and his want of economic knowledge of definite purpose made him unacceptable to the more radical and discontented Democrats. The capitalistic reorganization of the Democratic Party means the breaking away of this large element of radical and discontented Democracy. With it will merge a not inconsiderable element of the Republican Party, which voted for Mr. McKinley, not because it wanted him, but because it rightly saw only confusion in turning to Mr. Bryan. The danger of all this reshifting is the possible formation of a radical or new Democratic Party, with semi-socialist propositions and tendencies, to gather up and fuse this untaught and undisciplined American discontent, which probably represents one-third of the nation's voters. This new radical party will certainly appear, and possess the situation, unless socialists lay aside all factional differences and enter the national political field with a unity and dignified action that shall win this discontent and discipline it for intelligent and constructive effort on the basis of the international socialists' program. And, mind you, the agents of capitalism will secretly encourage this semi-socialistic party, in order to withstand the appearance of socialism as a definite and organized proposition to the American people.

The present Tory degradation of England is chiefly due to the tinkering, or so-called socialistic tendencies, of the Liberal Party. While English socialists were divided among themselves, the Liberal Party deluded the people with factory acts, municipal waterworks, and the like. It was this English liberalism, under the leadership of that prince of fakirs, Mr. Gladstone, that wrought the present moral and political prostitution of England.

Meanwhile, during our reshifting process, the Republican Party will be making steady encroachments upon liberty of speech and of suffrage. In more than one state, legislation has already been proposed that has no other motive than the elimination of the Socialist ticket from the official ballot. The courts of injustice and the subsidized public press, as well as an ignorant and hireling pulpit, will be turned against

that freedom of agitation and action which socialism needs for its progress.

And international preparations against socialism will increase. Behind the pomp and strut, the lies and treaties, of international diplomacy is the subtle and far-seeking purpose to unite the world-powers against the international socialist revolution. Diplomacy is today but the mere shadow cast by the vested interests of the great banking houses. And it is against the dreaded triumph of socialism that these banking houses are organizing the world's diplomacy. Not long ago, Kaiser Wilhelm frankly and brutally declared socialism to be the coming enemy against which the civilized world should arm itself. And he has had a ridiculous picture painted wherewith to pamphleteer his warning to Europe. Lord Salisbury has recently said that it is time for the nations to come to a mutual understanding, or else the dregs of civilization would overwhelm it in the near future. Lord Salisbury's dregs of civilization are the proletariat, no matter how else he may define his meaning. International understanding has already gone far enough to make sure that the menace of socialism in one nation means the cooperation of all the great world-powers against it. We had just as well understand that American socialism will not only have to meet American capitalism, but will have to be prepared to meet all Europe at the same time; for American capitalism will have armed Europe as its allies. For not a throne in Europe would stand for a year after the triumph of socialism in America.

Comrades, do we see the greatness of our opportunity? Are we great enough to unitedly take up the responsibility which that opportunity puts upon us? I wish we might feel something of the stupendous and century-reaching consequences of what we may decide in this meeting tonight. Who knows but Chicago socialists may be deciding the fate of the socialist movement for a generation, not only for America, but for the world? If we strive with each other upon questions of detail, or upon questions of place and power, then the new radical party of which I have been speaking will possess the field, and socialism as a distinct issue will be postponed for a generation. And we will perish in the wilderness because we are not worthy of our opportunity. But if we present a solidly united and harmonious comradeship, with an uncompromising socialist program, then in four years from now we shall

have grown strong enough to hold the balance of power in the national political situation. We are able to present this program and harmony, if we will. But, in order to match our opportunity, socialism must pass out of the sectarian stage, out of the stage of mere sectional propaganda, into lines of action that shall win American sympathy, and nobly awaken American labor to that class-consciousness without which we are helpless. We have come to the moment in which a harmonious and disciplined socialist movement may lead the untaught peoples into the cooperative commonwealth.

Unity and harmony of action depend upon the widest liberty of opinion and detail. We make socialism the betrayer of the people who are crying for liberty of life, if we win them to our program only to menace them at every turn by sheer authority, and drive them from one jealous faction to another, each faction claiming authoritative powers. The principle of authority, of the rule of a single dogma or center of authority, belongs to the capitalistic system and not to socialism. Mere authority is a brute principle at best. And it is upon this brute system of authority that the capitalistic system depends. Liberty of thought and action, under the capitalistic system, means loss of position, daily bread, and even life itself. Socialism cannot make progress by the capitalistic principle of authority upon which the church stands; the principle upon which the old political parties and governments stand; the principle upon which capitalistic and ecclesiastical education stands. Sheer authority, brute dogmatism, political bossism, factional strife, have no place among socialists. Insofar as we practice these we are traitors one to another, and capitalistic in spirit.

The international socialist program is broad enough for the widest variety of opinion as to detail, and as to the working out of principle. If socialism is to emancipate the world, it must stand for that liberty which the systems and institutions of the past have denied. We must remember that Marx's ideal was that of a perpetually fluid and endlessly growing civilization, in which every element of life may find free and full expression. The elemental meaning of socialism is the liberty of each man to take a free look at life, to see truth for himself, and to speak his own mind about what he sees, without let or menace from any source. Socialism is under bonds to see that each man makes his full contribution to the common thought and com-

mon life. If we are socialists in spirit as well as in name, we shall not only hear one another as comrades, but we shall gladly welcome every comrade into the full expression of thought and feeling, and give due and reverent consideration to even the weakest and most seemingly stupid among us. We must not only not restrain, but we must encourage and sacredly nourish the utmost individuality of life and thought in each comrade. We are true comrades insofar as we convince every man in the ranks, and every toiler in the street or in the mine, that he has an inestimable worth, and that he has an invaluable contribution to make to the human whole. If we have so little faith in the elemental meaning of socialism that we must resort to ecclesiastical and capitalistic tactics in order to gain our ends, then we will fail, and we ought to fail. And the blood of the world's disinherited will be upon our heads and not at the door of capitalism.

The American nation began with eighteenth century ideas of liberty. It began nobly. But the time the American revolution had reached the constitutional period, it already distrusted the liberty that was its inspiration. The Hamiltonian constitution of the United States was devised as an instrument for preventing the people from governing themselves. It has most perfectly succeeded in that for which it was devised. The ideals of Thomas Jefferson, of whom the Democratic Party is grotesquely ignorant, had small place in the crystallization of our institutions. The old American passion for liberty has thus met with sad and baffling disappointments. Only one disappointment in history equals it; and that is the monstrous perversion of Jesus by Christianity. The 19th Century has just gone out in a train of disappointments, beaten hopes, broken ideals, betrayed faiths, and doubted doubts.

Now socialism comes to our American life as the realization of the liberty that has met with sore disappointment; as the fulfillment of the genius and truth of democracy. Socialism points out the economic basis upon which democracy must stand in order to achieve liberty. It proclaims all liberty to rest back upon economic liberty, and all individuality to be rooted in economic unity. It affirms that there can be no liberty save through association; no true commonwealth save a cooperative commonwealth. It makes clear that democracy in the state is but a tantalism and a fiction, unless it be realized through democracy in production

and distribution. It witnesses that liberty, order, and progress depend now upon the ownership by the people of the means and sources of production. It offers history as the proof that there can be no individual liberty or social harmony in a competitive struggle which makes every man's life a pitched battle with civilization for economic sustenance. It declares that liberty to be a mockery which means merely the survival of the strong and the cunning through the devouring of the weak, or through the devouring of those who are too noble to strike down their brothers.

Socialism must work out, in its propaganda, the needed synthesis between unity of program and individual liberty of thought and action. We must plant ourselves upon a socialistic propaganda that is democratic in spirit, and that shall respond to the cry of the human soul for emancipation. And this does not mean compromise; for it is comradeship and tolerance among ourselves that removes all danger of compromise, or of parleying with the capitalistic enemy.

The rank and file of attached socialists, and several hundred thousand unattached socialists, are asking that we present to them an uncompromising and yet harmonious organization that shall command their moral enthusiasm; their noble support and joyful sacrifices. We must give what these ask of us, or perish as a present-day movement. If we stand for the unity of human interests, we must prove our faith and sincerity by uniting. If we stand for brotherhood, we must act like brothers, and not like the so-called Christians who call one another brother and then proceed to devour one another. If we stand for the cooperative commonwealth, then in God's name let us begin to cooperate among ourselves. Let us give trust, and we shall receive trust. Let us show confidence in one another, and we shall receive confidence. Divided by strife and suspicion, we fail and are faithless to the world's disinherited, who stretch forth to us worn hands of entreaty. United by patience, by goodwill and brave comradeship, we shall conquer the world and make it a fit place for free men and comrades to live in. And the stars themselves cannot fight against us.

As a socialist, I believe I can be true to my comrades only by taking the position that I will let no man under the skies make me his personal enemy. At the same time, I will let no man take from me one jot or tittle of the philosophy and principle upon which so-

cialism bases itself.

Socialists are not asking that old leaders get out of the way; for they recognize the long hardships which these leaders have undergone, and their noble pioneer service in the great cause. The socialist ranks are only asking that their leaders learn to work together and lead harmoniously. For the multitudes who really want socialism cannot bear to have their hopes, and the master-opportunity of socialism, wrecked by factional strifes, which are not only senseless and meaningless, but wicked. I cannot believe that these strifes will continue. And I do not believe that they represent the real hearts and minds of those who have engaged in them. We have only to witness this meeting tonight, which has impressed me with its moral earnestness more than anything else. I have not seen a sign nor heard a syllable of strife for advantage in the work of this day; in the committee room and on the floor I have seen nothing but an honest and earnest desire for the good of socialism. I believe that the deep feeling of responsibility and unity which pervades us at this hour really represents the spirit and future of American socialism. If we here unite in one body and organism of purpose and action, then we shall compel the unity of socialists throughout the United States. And a united and harmonious socialist movement in America means a great new fire of hope kindled upon every socialist altar in Europe.

Socialism needs no religion imposed upon it from without, and the less it has of such the safer it will be its course. But it does need to be shot through with that spiritual passion without which, as Hegel says, no great movement ever prevails. And socialism has within itself the germ of that passion; it has the seed of a new religion. Socialism has power to become its own religion. Essentially, socialism is a religion — the religion of life and brotherhood for which the world has long waited. It has in it that purpose which can command the idealistic motive that lies deep in even the most matter-of-fact man. Hundreds of thousands of young men and women are crying out for some cause in which they can invest their lives; some cause that shall afford them altars of exalted and self-denying service. They see the gods and their temples burning to ashes, and they ask for something that shall take the place of these in supplying the most elemental need of the human soul. Socialism can supply that need. It

comes to the common life as the religion of a free and happy earth; the religion of comradeship, and mutual hope and brotherhood. Let socialists be true to the deeper meanings of the class struggle, and they may gather into the service of socialism the great fund of religious purpose and passion which is now heartsick, unattached and wasted. And this religious passion, quicker than anything else, will waken the working class to the consciousness of its worth and destiny, and of the struggle and solidarity by which the emancipation of life and labor must come.

Let me close with the proposition with which I began: that only a factional and divided socialist movement can defeat socialism. There is no power in capitalism, nor in the universe, that can prevent the consummation of a united and harmonious socialist movement in the cooperative commonwealth. There has never come to the world of labor, nor to the international socialist movement, nor to the long struggle of man for liberty, an opportunity like unto that which the American political and religious situation now presents. The American people, led by the politicians to continued economic slaughter, are finding themselves in the economic condition of the proletarian, whose soul and body have been so long the grist of the capitalist mill, that he has had no opportunity to become class-conscious, or aspire to better things. Vast intellectual and religious resources are offering themselves

to the socialist cause. Now is the opportunity of socialism to gather the disappointed American democracy, and the freely-offered brain and heart of the younger men and women of the educated class, into the service of inspiring and disciplining American labor for the coming struggle and the coming liberty. That opportunity means a responsibility that shall match it. For opportunity never calls a people, or a class, to responsibility without the people or the class being potentially able to respond. The way in which we meet this responsibility and opportunity can be nothing less than a divine judgment upon our lives and upon our cause. The call which comes to Chicago socialists tonight makes this the solemn and stupendous moment of every comrade's life, and ought to make heroes and Titans of us all. If we look our opportunity nobly in the face, and turn from our differences to our task with a spirit that shall melt all strifes and fuse all efforts, then in four years from now we shall find lined up against the capitalist system an invincible army of socialist comrades, filled with the joy of battle and the certainty of victory.

America is the stage on which international socialist revolution may first be dramatized. The curtain is rung up, and we are called upon the stage. In God's name, and in the name of the world's disinherited, let us play our parts nobly and acquit ourselves like men.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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