
Why An Independent Labor Party?

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There have been many splits, re-splits, counter-splits, duplicate splits, and other splits in the Socialist Movement of America in the past 5 years, or in the various factions that once made up the Socialist Movement. There seems to have been as many ideas how *not* to do things as the middle-age exponents of religion had of how to get to heaven or hell. These ideas were all products of conflicting opinions, and the stress of emotionalism growing out of the world war; regrettable but inevitable at the present stage of human understanding. This article is not being written for the purpose of holding a postmortem over our past mistakes, but to point out what seems to the writer to be an immediate danger ahead.

There seems to be an idea among many, who were among the most severe critics of our Left Wing Communist comrades for their efforts to copy the Russian Revolution and introduce the tactics of the Russian movement in this country, that we must go to the other extreme of coddling a labor party, copied after the Independent Labour Party of England. For the past 2 years, this idea has been threshed about, and numerous articles from leading Socialists have been printed in support of it. The writer of this article accepts neither the "Left Wingism" of the Communists and their impossible tactics, nor the "Right Wingism" of the Laborites, who would make the Class Struggle respectable by presenting its political manifestation under another name. One of the strangest things of all is to see the former extreme radicals, to whom the Socialist Movement was anathema because of its "yellow" hue, joining with those of the extreme right in demanding a respectable, middle-of-the-road, get-together, get-something-just-as-good-right-away, milk-and-water-reform Labor Party. Robert Minor lets out

a screech in the December [1922] *Liberator* for a labor party and Seymour Stedman seems to be strongly in favor of a labor party. Well, anyway, there is going to be peace and harmony on earth and goodwill among men when these two estimable comrades can meet on the same political platform.

What is the excuse or necessity for organizing an Independent Labor Party? This question I am directing at the Socialists, and especially those of the Socialist Party who have been in favor of this move. There seems to be a lurking suspicion in the mind of many that we can make ourselves more respectable by changing our name, to get away from that dreadful word SOCIALISM; that if we masqueraded the political expression of the Class Struggle under some other name, large bunches of the working class would quell the factional differences in our movement, and we could have one grand get-together political love feast. Will any of these contentions, and other that are put forward, bear investigation and analysis?

Are the Socialist principles and fundamental philosophy unsound? If so, we have been on the wrong track all the time. If the fundamental principles of Socialism are sound, then why try to build another movement on a false foundation? If we can't build a labor party out of the Socialist Party, we can't build it out of anything for some generations to come. We have two generations of Socialist teachings and propaganda behind us, and almost a generation of actual political experience. No movement in the world's history has produced such an abundant literature in so short a time, covering every possible phase of economic, political, and social life, as has the Socialist movement. It is founded on broad, fundamental principles that have been worked out by thousands of painstaking students

and investigators. Shall we abandon all this for the sake of a few immediate election gains?

Any movement worthwhile, no matter what name it is given, will have to be founded on the three cardinal principles of the Socialist philosophy, viz, that society is divided into classes with conflicting economic interest; that economic determinism is the mainspring of human action; that surplus values are wrested from the working class through the private ownership and monopoly of the jobs. *When a political or economic movement under any name threatens the interest of the privileged class, they will get out the paint pots and paint it red enough to suit any Bolshevik.*

I can't see much consistence in criticizing Communists for trying to rape Russia and reproduce out of hand the Russian Revolution here, and then turn 'round and try to rape England by founding an Independent Labor Party. We believe in neither Russia nor England, and certainly haven't the material or conditions to build a labor party here that exists in England. I for one am proud of the name of the Socialist Party, proud of its traditions and of the enemies it has made; and as for its mistakes, any other party under any name will in 21 years make just as many. It will taken any other party many years to gain the prestige and experience that the Socialist Party has, and I am sure that the change of a name is not going to make the working class more wise, or the capitalist class less opposed to us.

We can make a real labor party out of the Socialist Party within the next 15 or 20 years, or we can, like the children of Israel, wander in the wilderness for the next 40. Some of our eminent Socialists seem to be headed for the jungle. Shall we sidetrack the real thing for the counterfeit? The recent meeting in Cleveland, I hope, has proven to some of the labor party fans the intellectual bankruptcy of the trade union

movement in this country.† They are as void of social vision as the leaders of the Democratic and Republican Parties.

Political parties do not grow up, get bald-headed, and loose their teeth quite as soon as we do as individuals. A political party that is only 21 years old is scarcely in the teething stage. The Democratic Party has long since passed the century mark, is able to hobble around without crutches, and can even dance political jazz and flirt with the flappers. The Republican Party is nearing the Biblical three-score-and-ten and seems to be a pretty robust specimen, but is still young enough to be spanked occasionally. When the Socialist Party cuts enough teeth to take solid nourishment without getting a stomach ache, we may feel proud of the kid, who knows?

I am not saying that we will not try out a labor party, but I am contending it is not a step forward. But as the human race seems destined to try out every possible foolish thing that can be thought of, there is a possibility that we waste 15 or 20 years experimenting and chasing rainbows of respectability. As we have an eternity ahead of us, as well as an eternity behind us, I am not going to waste much sleep over the matter, but go hammering away in an effort to rebuild the shattered forces of the Socialist movement.

On a 2 week organization trip in Illinois, outside of Chicago during December [1922], I reorganized 5 locals, secured 10 memberships-at-large, collected \$94.30 in dues, \$25 for Chicago Socialist subscriptions, and \$27.85 in donations to the organization fund. This was all done by personal work, and I am sure most if not all the comrades I talked to or came in contact with want to go ahead with this kind of work. We have the making of the only labor party worthwhile in our hands, and that is in the rebuilding of the Socialist movement.

†-Reference is to the 2nd Conference of the Conference for Progressive Political Action, held in Cleveland from Dec. 11-12, 1922. Fired by union opposition to the establishment of a labor party, the conference defeated a resolution calling for "independent political action by the agricultural and industrial workers through a party of their own" by a vote of 64-52, prompting the Farmer-Labor Party of the United States to sever connections with the organization.

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