

This same policy of straddling, of begging every question until circumstances force a decision has dominated the party ever since it has become a recognized force in this country. And that is particularly true in its treatment of organized labor. For decades the Socialist Party has realized that the policy of the American Federation of Labor condemns the organized working class to economic ineffectuality. It has seen that the failure—nay, the refusal—of the A. F. of L. leaders to organize the unskilled laborers must eventually cut the throat of organized labor itself. It supported, in theory, a system of industrial unionism to replace the system of craft unions that was keeping Mr. Gompers and other clever demagogues in power at the head of the American labor movement. It adopted a policy of boring from within, of educating the membership of the labor union movement without attacking its leaders. It refused to take sides in labor disputes, fearing to support radical insurgents against the domination of A. F. of L. leaders, lest by so doing it alienate the membership.

What has this policy accomplished? The element to which we have catered for years, the progressive leaders who were to become a force for Socialism in the labor movement, flocked to the support of American militarism as soon as the war broke out, and today are the mainstay of the new Labor party. After more than 20 years of "boring from within" Gompers was re-elected at the Atlantic City convention with one dissenting vote—that of a Westerner who stood in no connection with the radical or Socialist labor movement.

Undoubtedly the propaganda work of the Socialist movement has had its effect upon the working class of the country. The determined language in which organized labor speaks today, the astonishing demands that are being made of the government by the railroad workers, that most conservative of all organizations, are the fruits of the seed that were sown by our speakers and our literature in the past. But we have been so completely out of touch with the revolution that has been going on within the A. F. of L. that we are as astounded by the new turn affairs have taken as the capitalist class itself. The Socialist Party which should have led and directed a movement of such enormous promise, is condemned to impotence because it stood idly by allowing the ferment of discontent to break its own channels through the wall of conservatism that surrounded the American labor movement. With the co-operation and leadership of a determined and aggressive Socialist Party, the step that has just been taken by the

railway workers could become the beginning of a great class-conscious movement of the masses. Without its leadership it lacks driving and directing force and will peter out into a thousand channels of capitalist politics.

We have all of us heard the argument that elected Socialist officials will be no better than the others, once they are in power. It seemed an easy question to answer and yet in it lies the secret of our lack of success among the American working class. The American workingman is not interested in politics. To him it is a game of chance, in which the winner collects the spoils. Generations of political corruption have engrafted upon his mind the idea that it is useless to hope for reform from the elected law-making bodies. He meets all political parties with a skepticism that has become so much a part of his nature that it is almost impossible to overcome it. By our insistence upon the purely political character of the Socialist movement we have put ourselves in his eyes on a level with the other parties. By our refusal to become a driving and directing force in his struggle for economic betterment, the only movement whose aims and purposes he appreciates and understands, we have alienated ourselves completely from the actual class-struggle between capital and labor.

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These things are not new. But the upheaval of the Socialist international, and the price the European movements have paid for their failure to grow with the times in which they live, make rigid self-examination at this time imperative. Capitalist society stands on the brink of ruin. The mad havoc that the last years have wrought, depleted the world of its resources. Capitalist methods of production are powerless to meet the situation. High prices and wanton profiteering are arousing the people in every country of the world to a blind fury. Strikes are breaking out everywhere and are being fought out with a tenacity of purpose and a degree of determination that bodes ill for the master class. The young men who have returned from the front have little patience with pleas for moderation and compromise. They have learned their lesson well, and are ready to get what they want, fearlessly, without regard to consequences.

Is the Socialist Party ready to meet the new situation? Is it prepared to satisfy the need of the dissatisfied masses for self-expression? Can it crystallize this dissatisfaction, this spirit of unrest, into a class-conscious, purposeful movement?