
Socialism — The Hope of the World:

Keynote Address to the 1920 Socialist Party Convention: New York City — May 8, 1920.

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I am grateful to you for your greeting; it is a miserable business being sick, especially at a time when every hour sees more history unrolled than years in ordinary times. I am glad to be back, and I will stay with you.

This is the third convention of the Socialist Party since the last Presidential election. The two preceding conventions met in an atmosphere of violent storm and stress and have faced conditions which put the very life and soul of our movement to a crucial test.

When we met in St. Louis in 1917, the country had just been drawn into the world war, and the great question was whether the Socialists of America would have the vision and courage to uphold the ideal of human solidarity in the face of the vehement national hysteria and terrorism. We did.

When we met in Chicago in 1919, the fighting was over, but the war was not. The terrible experiences of the prolonged world war and the catastrophic social and political changes which accompanied and followed it had created new issues and new alignments

in the Socialist movement.

All over the world Socialism was split into contending and antagonistic camps, ranging from those who had betrayed the vital principles of the movement during the war and were cooperating with its enemies

after the war, to those who, in their impulse of resentment and impatience, were ready to surrender the most effective methods of the Socialist propaganda, the slow but certain methods of political education and struggle.

The question then was whether the Socialists of America would remain true to the fundamental principles and methods of the militant working class Socialist Party, rejecting the suicidal compromises of the extreme right as well as the sterile revolutionary phrases of the extreme left. We did.

Present Danger from Without.

In the nominating convention of 1920, the Socialist Party is confronted by a situation somewhat similar to that of last year, except that this time the danger comes not from within our ranks but outside of them.

Within the last year all the powers of darkness and reaction in the country have united in a concerted attack upon the Socialist movement unparalleled in



ferociousness and lawlessness.

The obvious object of the provocative onslaught is to crush the spirit and paralyze the struggles of the Socialist movement or to goad it into a policy of desperation and lawlessness, thus furnishing its opponents the pretext for wholesale violent reprisals and physical extermination.

The great question before this convention is: Will the Socialists of America prove true enough and brave enough to survive the attack and to withstand the provocation? We will.

Persecuted, defamed, and outlawed as they may be, the Socialists of America enter the coming national campaign of 1920 with frame erect, spirit unbroken, and enthusiasm unchecked — determined to continue the battle without letup or relaxation. Confident in the righteousness of our cause and the imminence of its victory, we defy and challenge the combined powers of capitalist reaction.

Growth of the World Socialist Movement.

For while our frightened profiteers are engaging in a stupid campaign to kill our movement by violence, every social force at home and abroad is working irresistibly for the triumph of Socialism.

In Europe, where the ruling classes are wiser than ours, one nation after another is surrendering to the overwhelming tide of the Socialist movement. The great working class republic of Russia (*applause*) has survived all counterrevolutionary attacks, domestic and foreign, and now, after a continuous and embittered struggle of 30 months, it stands before the world more strongly entrenched, more hopeful and confident than ever.

In Sweden, in Czecho-Slovakia, in Germany and Austria, Socialists largely are in control of the government.

In England, Italy, France, and Scandinavian countries, the Socialist workers are fast gaining political power. The most enlightened nations have openly or tacitly recognized that Socialism alone has the moral and intellectual resources to rebuild and revivify the shattered world, and in this, as in all other vital currents of modern life, the United States cannot effectively or permanently seclude itself from the rest of the world.

Nor do we, American Socialists, depend for our hope of success solely upon the precedent and example of Europe. The conditions of our own country and the record of our own party are the gauge of our ultimate victory here.

We have nothing to retract, nothing to apologize for, in connection with our stand in recent years.

Socialists Alone Against the Slaughter.

When Congress committed the United States to participation in the world war, ours was the only organized political voice in the country to protest. We declared that the inhuman slaughter in Europe was born in a sanguinary clash of commercial interests and imperialistic ambitions.

We warned our countrymen that the savage contest of arms would bring no peace, no liberty, and no happiness in the world, but that it would result in misery and desolation. Now the whole world is beginning to see the justice of our criticism and the tragic fulfillment of our prediction.

One year and a half after the formal cessation of hostilities, there is no peace in Europe; the victorious powers are intriguing among themselves about land grabs and national advantages, while Europe is starved and the ghastly wounds inflicted by the war upon the whole system of human civilization remain open and bleeding.

Today it is becoming increasingly clearer that if the treaty of “peace” is not written all over, the war will have to be fought all over — unless the worldwide triumph of Socialism overtakes both the treaty and war.

And as time goes on, the passions and prejudices aroused by the war will die out, its stultifying slogans created during the war will be forgotten, its horrors and ruins alone will stare accusingly at mankind from the blackest page of the world’s history.

Then a sobered America will look back with gratitude to the small band of Socialists who saw the danger and sounded the warning, and were persecuted and jailed. This sobering up will be one of the factors that will make the American people turn to Socialism.

And this time it will be not merely a general and abstract spirit of so-called Socialism, but the definite and organized Socialism of the Socialist Party which

will lead the fight of the workers.

Wilson the Hypocrite.

Time and again the Socialist struggle has been sidetracked by the appearance of a so-called radical leader in the ranks of one of the old parties who held out the promise of immediate victory and salvation for the common people. Time and again the common people believed in the false prophet and voted him into power, only to reap a heavy harvest of bitter disappointment.

If there remain any large sections of workers who put their naive faith in old party messiahs, Woodrow Wilson must have effectively destroyed their faith. For be it remembered that in 1916, Woodrow Wilson ran as a "radical." He promised practically Socialism through the shortcut of the Democratic Party.

One-half of the normal supporters of the Socialist Party cast their votes for him. Woodrow Wilson was elected over Charles E. Hughes by the vote of Socialists. In California alone, the defection in the normal Socialist vote determined his victory in the Presidential contest.

Mr. Wilson's administration in the last 3 years has furnished the most striking and abhorrent proof of the fallacy of the "good man" theory in politics.

Wilson, the pacifist, drew us into the world's most frightful war.

Wilson, the anti-militarist, imposed conscription on the country in war, and urged a large standing army and a huge navy in peace.

Wilson, the Democrat, arrogated to himself autocratic powers grossly inconsistent with a republican form of government.

Wilson, the liberal, revived the medieval institutions of the inquisition of speech, thought and conscience. His administration suppressed or tried to suppress radical publications, raided homes and meeting places of its political opponents, destroyed their property, and assaulted their persons.

Wilson, the apostle of the "new freedom," infested the country with stool pigeons, spies, and agents provocateurs and filled the jails with political prisoners.

Wilson, the champion of labor, restored involuntary servitude in the mines and on the railroads.

Wilson, the idealist and humanitarian, has inaugurated a reign of intellectual obscurantism, moral terrorism, and political reaction, the like of which the country had never known before.

The morbid national psychology which he has helped to create has produced such atavistic political types as [Mitchell] Palmer, [Albert] Burleson, [Thaddeus] Sweet, and [Clayton] Lusk. It has advanced to places of honor political mountebanks like Ole Hanson, but has put into prison stripes the noblest and truest types of American manhood, persons like Eugene Victor Debs.

Wilson's Collapse Not Accidental.

The pitiful collapse of Wilson's liberalism was nothing accidental.

Woodrow Wilson was probably inspired by the best of intentions when he ran for re-election. But he did not express the sentiments, convictions, or interest of the class he represented or the political party to which he owed allegiance.

When the great crisis came and he was forced to choose between the class and the party to whom he belonged and the workers for whom he professed a platonic affection, he rallied to his class and party interests.

Nor was Wilson's fall purely personal. When Woodrow Wilson fell, the entire structure of middle class and capitalist liberalism tumbled with him like a house of cards.

Today there is not throughout the length and breadth of the United States a single radical or even progressive political group of any importance outside of the organized Socialist movement.

Socialist Party the Only Alternative.

The attempts of some advanced organized workers to form an independent political party of labor on a national scale has so far foundered upon the rock of conservatism and narrowness of the American Federation leadership, and the efforts to create a progressive middle class party have met with little response.

The only active and organized force in American politics that combats reaction and oppression, that stands for the large masses of the workers and for a

social order of justice and industrial equality is the Socialist Party.

It is in the light of this fact that the importance of the Socialist Party in American politics must be measured. Its present strength counts for little. Its ability to build for the future is of tremendous historical significance.

The Socialist Party will double or treble its membership before the year is over and will poll upward of 2 million votes for its Presidential candidates.

But more important than our membership and our vote is the preservation of the integrity, the soul of our party as an effective instrument for the coming social reconstruction. It is vital and indispensable for the ultimate triumph of our great cause that our party be preserved as a Socialist party in the true meaning of the term.

Not a party of mere patchwork reform, nor yet as a party of sham revolutionary phrases, but as a militant Social Democratic party, firmly rooted in the working class movement, and operating on a program of education and organization and training in the economic and political struggle.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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