
America Turns to Socialism

by Morris Hillquit

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It is always unwise to forecast election returns 8 weeks before election, and it would be particularly rash to attempt at this time a numerical prediction of the Socialist vote in the coming Presidential election. The United States is not the same country today that it was in 1916. The 4 year period that has elapsed since the last Presidential election has marked a sudden and revolutionary change in the political institutions, industrial relations, and social notions of the world. This change is bound to reflect itself in our politics as it has in our economics. It will have a powerful bearing on the political fortunes of American Socialism.



The combined Socialist vote of Europe, outside of Russia, has risen from about 10 million — the best pre-war record — to about 30 million in 1920, and the main causes which account for the trebling of the political strength of European Socialism are also operative in the United States.

The people here as elsewhere are disillusioned with the war and its results. They feel that the colossal destruction of life and property has been in vain; that the victory of our arms brought to the world neither security nor social justice. They know that true wages have been badly cut, that prime necessities of decent existence have been put beyond their reach through monstrous price increases, and that their standards of life are being steadily depressed, while profiteering capitalists have made and are still making fabulous new fortunes. They see industries dislocated, commerce

disrupted, and the precarious world peace menaced anew by the incapable and rapacious governments of the ruling classes — and they turn to Socialism for relief.

The example of the workers' and peasants' republic of Russia have opened new vistas to the oppressed of all nations, while the aggressive hostility, which has characterized the blundering Russian policy of all capitalist governments, including our own, has served to intensify class feelings.

It is true that economic breakdown has not been nearly as severe in the United States as it has been in most countries of Europe, but to offset this advantage, our government has managed to create an immense volume of political resentment through an absurd reactionary policy of repression. It has sown rebellion among the miners and railroad workers by making common cause with their employers and forcing them to submit to unfair conditions of work and wages, and has alienated large bodies of liberal-minded citizens by continuing stringent war measures against the freedom of press, speech, and conscience long after the war was over. The brutal blow at representative government which was first struck at Washington in the exclusion of Victor L. Berger from the House of Representatives and repeated even more shamelessly in the ouster of the 5 Socialist Assemblymen in Albany, has served to reveal the menace to democracy inherent in the old parties, while their fusion in the strong Socialist districts of New York in this year of alleged contest for supremacy between them has definitely established their partnership in reaction.

And then to cap the climax of Socialist advantages in the coming election, the Republican and Democratic Parties have named for the Presidency two colorless and commonplace candidates, who make no

appeal to the imagination of the voter, while Eugene V. Debs, the Socialist candidate, brings into the political arena a brilliant and magnetic personality and a record of lifelong devotion to the cause of the humble and oppressed.

It may be that the vote which will be cast for Debs on November 2, 1920, will not yet register the full strength of the growing Socialist sentiment in this country, but it is safe to predict that it will establish a new high record and become a factor to be seriously reckoned with in American politics ever hereafter. The Socialist vote will of course come primarily from the working class, but it will not be confined to it. Socialist sympathizers are to be found in growing numbers among the professionals and farmers and even among men of business and wealth; they come from disillusioned supporters of the present administration as well as from the ranks of the former Progressives and Republicans.

I do not believe the Farmer-Labor Party will seriously interfere with the Socialist vote. If the newly formed party were constituted by the bulk of organized labor, it would attract the working class vote; if it represented the recognized organization of farmers it would hold a special appeal for the rural voters; if it were a party of the liberal middle class it could count

upon the support of the so-called "conservative" progressives in politics. But the "Farmer-Labor" Party is an indigestible combination of all these three fields, and as such it is doomed to failure. The conservative trade unionists and farmers will vote for the old parties. The radicals among them will vote for Debs.

I believe the 5 ousted Socialist Assemblymen [from New York] will be returned by increased majorities. In the coming special election they will represent not only the cause of Socialism but also the principle of representative government. They will command the support of all friends of democratic institutions as well as that of the Socialist sympathizers in the districts. Whether they will be seated or ousted anew none but the statesmen in the inner circle of the Republican state machine can venture to predict. The Socialists as such will contemplate the proceeding with philosophic calm. They can afford to be ousted as often as their Republican and Democratic opponents can afford to oust them. The more flauntingly and flagrantly the old party representatives violate the fundamental principles of popular government the sooner will come the day when the power to violate such principles will be taken from them by the victorious hosts of the Socialist movement.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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