

REPORT OF THE SOCIALIST LABOR PARTY OF AMERICA TO THE AMSTERDAM CONGRESS.

To the International Socialist Congress of Amsterdam,
August 14, 1904:

Greeting:—

To judge by the frequent expressions of astonishment from European sources at what they call the backwardness of the Socialist Movement in America—a backwardness which they judge wholly by votes—the conclusion is warranted that essential features of America are not given the weight that they are entitled to, or are wholly overlooked. What these features are the country's census furnishes the material to work upon, and, again, the immortal genius of Karl Marx supplies us with the principle to guide us in the selection of the requisite categories of fact and with the norm by which to gauge and analyze the material thus gathered.

In the monograph “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” the proletarian insurrection of 1848 is used as a text for the following generalization:

“Nations enjoying an older civilization, having developed class distinctions, modern conditions of production, an intellectual consciousness, wherein all traditions of old have been dissolved through the work of centuries, with such countries the republic means only the POLITICAL REVOLUTIONARY FORM OF BOURGEOIS SOCIETY{,} not its CONSERVATIVE FORM OF EXISTENCE,” and this grave fact is brought out forcibly by contrasting such a country, France, with “the United States of America, where true enough, the classes already exist, but have not yet acquired permanent character, are in constant flux and reflux, constantly changing their elements and yielding them up to one another; where the modern means of production, instead of coinciding with a stagnant population, rather compensate for the relative scarcity of heads and hands; and finally, where the feverishly youthful life of material production, which has to appropriate a new world to itself{,} has so far left neither time nor opportunity to

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abolish the illusions of old.”

This was written in 1852. The giant strides since made by America, her fabulous production of wealth, rise in manufacture and agriculture that practically place her at the head of all other nations in this respect, in short, the stupendous stage of capitalist development that the country has reached, would seem to remove the contrast. It does not. These changes are not enough to draw conclusions as to the stage of Socialism that may be expected. The above passages from Marx explain why, and they indicate what other factors need consideration before a bourgeois republic has left behind it its “conservative form of existence” and entered upon that “political revolutionary” stage of its life, without which a Socialist Movement can not be expected to gain its steerage way. These factors—the “permanent character” and, therefore, “intellectual consciousness” of the classes, due to the “traditions of old having been dissolved through the work of centuries”; the maturity of life of material production which, no longer having “to appropriate a new world to itself,” has the requisite time and opportunity “to abolish the illusions of old,” etc.,—also require consideration and their status ascertained. They are essential to a final and intelligent conclusion. A rough and rapid sketch of the facts that throw light upon these factors will clarify the situation.

Since the census facts of 1850 on which Marx drew, the continental area of the United States has been widened by not less than 1,057,441 square miles, or not far from doubled what it was in 1850; as a result, the center of population, which in 1850 was at 81 deg. 19 min. longitude, or 23 miles southwest of Parkersburg in the present State of West Virginia, has since shifted westward fully four degrees of longitude, and now lies six miles west of Columbus, Ind.; and as a further or accompanying result, the center of manufacture, which in 1850 lay at 77 deg. 25 min. longitude, near Mifflintown, Pa., has since steadily traveled westward until it has today reached 82 deg. 12 min. longitude near Mansfield in central Ohio. Nor has the westward move stopped. One more fact of importance along this line of inquiry will suffice to aid in forming an idea of the meteorologic lay of social conditions, so to speak. While as late as 1880, thirty years after Marx’ monograph, the census returned 55,404 water wheels and no electric motors. Ten years later

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the water wheels had fallen to 39,008 and the electric motors, starting then, have since risen to 16,923 and steam power in proportion. The situation, brought about by these facts, may be summed up by the light of the quaint report that played-out locomotive engines, which once did service on our city elevated roads and have been discarded for electric motors, now are drawing trains on the railroads in China! Machinery and methods of production, discarded in more advanced centers, are constantly reappearing in less advanced localities, carried thither by the flux of our population westward. It goes without saying, that under such conditions, not only is the population still not “stagnant,” not only is there still a “constant flux and reflux,” not only is there still a “constant changing” or “yielding up to one another” by the classes, but that still the odd phenomenon is visible in America of families with members in all the classes, from the upper and plutocratic class, down through the various gradations of the middle class, down to the “house-and-lot”-owning wage slave in the shop, and even further down to the wholly propertiless proletariat. It goes without saying that, under such conditions, there still is in America that “feverishly youthful life of material production” and that, accordingly, “the illusions of old” have not yet had time to be wiped out. Nor has the immigration from Europe aided matters. On the whole it has fallen in with the stream as it flows. It is, for instance, a conservative estimate that if one-half the Europeans, now located in Greater New York and who in their old homes pronounced themselves Socialists, remained so here, the Socialist organization in the city alone would have not less than 25,000 enrolled members. Yet there is no such membership or anything like it. The natives’ old illusions regarding material prospects draw the bulk of the immigrants into its {their?} vortex.

It goes without saying that such conditions point to the existing bourgeois republic of America as still traveling in the orbit that Marx observed it in during 1852,—at the CONSERVATIVE and not yet the POLITICAL REVOLUTIONARY form of its existence. In short, these conditions explain why, as yet, despite the stupendous development of capitalism in the country, a numerically powerful Socialist Labor Party, such as such a capitalist development might at first blush mislead the casual observer into expecting,

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does not and can not yet exist. Incidentally, these conditions throw valuable light upon the nature of the “revolutionary movements” that periodically spring up, whose discordant waves angrily beat against the Socialist Labor Party, and whose mouthpieces make so much noise—abroad. It explains, for instance, the flaring up of the Single Tax Movement with its 300,000 votes in the eighties; it explains the Populist Movement of a decade later, in the nineties, with its 1,200,000 votes; it explains the latest of the serial in direct line of succession, the so-called Socialist or Social Democratic Movement of this decade with its 250,000 votes. The first two have already passed away, and the latter—after adopting a “revisionist” platform and a trades union resolution, which its own delegate to this International Congress, Mr. Ernst Untermann, admits in the “Neue Zeit” of last May 28th to be “a covert endorsement of the American Federation of Labor, which meant nothing else than a thrust at the American Labor Union, which had seceded from the former organization in order to EMANCIPATE ITSELF FROM THE DOMINATION OF THE REACTIONISTS AND HAND-MAIDS OF THE CAPITALISTS,” and which, with stronger emphasis, the “American Labor Union Journal” of May 26th, a hitherto upholder of the said so-called Socialist party, deliberately brands as “COMMITTING THE PARTY TO SCAB-HERDING”—may be said to have fairly entered upon the period of its dissolution. Each of these movements successively set itself up as the AMERICAN Socialist Movement and waged violent war against the Socialist Labor Party during their flickering existence, and then—dragged down and throttled by the umbilical cord of the illusions that are born from the conditions in the land sketched above*—after living their noisy day, regularly and fatedly entered

* The passage in the above article of the “American Labor Union Journal” is worth reproducing in full in that it illuminates a goodly portion of the umbilical cord that fatedly drags down and throttles all these alleged “American Socialist” movements which periodically rise against the Socialist Labor Party. This is the passage:

“The men who spoke in support of the resolution (the substitute) from Ben Hanford to Hilquit did not attempt to reply to these arguments. They kept up a constant reiteration of the charges that those who opposed the resolution are opposed to trades unions, which was a thousand miles from the truth, the facts being that the opposition was not to trades union endorsement, but to the kind of trades unionism it was sought to endorse. AS IT STANDS THE SOCIALIST PARTY IS COMMITTED TO SCAB-HERDING, organization of dual unions, misleading of the working class, the expenditure of union funds to defeat Socialist candidates, the

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upon their period of dissolution,—never, however, without regularly leaving behind a more or less solid sediment for the Socialist Labor Party, whom, on the other hand, and as regularly, during the period of their rise and growth, they cleansed, by drawing to themselves, of unfit and unripe elements that, in the intervals, had gravitated towards the S.L.P. Thus, since its incipient vote of 13,337 in 1890, the first year of its real existence, the vote record of the Socialist Labor Party, during the following presidential or national campaign years, presents the following table:

In 1892—21,157 votes;

In 1896—36,564 votes;

In 1900—34,191 votes.

In 1902, not a presidential year but the nearest so far approach thereto through State elections, the vote again rose to 53,763.

If proper weight is given to the social conditions sketched above, another circumstance of much weight will transpire—the circumstance that in America, the small vote of a bona fide Socialist organization is no criterion of its strength, of the work it does, or of the Socialist sentiment in the land, in short, it is no criterion of the proximity or distance of the crowning event, of the dethronement of the capitalist class. In America capitalist morality has invaded the hustings. The chicanery practised by the ruling class in the factory, the retail shop or their legalized gambling dens, known as “stock exchanges,” has been introduced by them into the electoral field, and there sways supreme. The laws they have enacted to keep their respective parties from cheating each other would furnish a

segregation of the working class into craft units which are powerless to accomplish anything, AND IT HAS BEEN COMMITTED TO THIS BECAUSE A FEW AMBITIOUS EASTERN COMRADES WERE ANXIOUS TO MAKE THINGS PLEASANT FOR THEMSELVES IN THE PURE AND SIMPLE UNIONS.”

And in a subsequent article, June 2, the same paper explains in what consists the “making of things pleasant for themselves” by the Eastern members, the dominant element, in its party. It says:

“The rank and file have no axes to grind. They have no inducement TO CRAWL LIKE WHIPPED CURS AT THE FOOT OF A NATIONAL LABOR FAKIR. The rank and file are not SEEKING PREFERMENT in pure and simple bodies. They are not SEEKING A DELEGATESHIP ABROAD, nor are they after AN ORGANIZER’S COMMISSION in fakirdom. They have no PAPERS TO PEDDLE in fakirdom”—in short, the umbilical cord of the private and guild interests of that eastern and dominant element of the so-called Socialist, alias Social Democratic, party is of a nature that must inevitably betray the working class, and consequently throttle the said party as its lineal ancestors did.

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living Montesquieu with a matchless theme for a matchless chapter on "The Spirit of Legislation." Of course, the spirit of these anti-fraud election laws directly warrants the contending parties of the ruling class to ignore, aye, to violate them against a bona fide party of Socialism. The unseating of a Congressman for fraudulent election practices is not unknown, but it is never practiced except by the majority against the minority party when the former needs the seat. Such a thing as the unseating of a capitalist class member of the Reichstag for fraud and ordering a new election at which a Socialist candidate is elected, as has happened in Germany; or the unseating, for similar reasons, of a Count Boni de Castellane, the sharer, through marriage, of our American capitalist Jay Gould's millions—strikes our American capitalists, and all others who are swayed by their modes of thought, as incomprehensibly silly. They understand it as little as western people understand the sentiment of a Japanese soldier to rather die than surrender to the Russians. What that means to a vote that really threatens the ruling class is obvious. Obvious, consequently, is the fact that the day of the Socialist vote is not yet. The capitalist corruptionists thwart to-day the fiat of the ballot. But monkeying with the thermometer never yet affected the temperature.

Accordingly, the criterion of the seaworthiness of a Socialist Movement in the waters of American conditions is the character of its agitational, educational, and organizing propaganda; the quantity and quality of the literature it soaks the country with; the strictness of its self-imposed discipline; the firmness and intrepidity of its posture. The Socialist Labor Party has for now four years published the only Socialist daily paper in the English-speaking world—the *Daily People*; for the last thirteen years it has published a weekly—the *Weekly People*. These, besides the vast literature that it publishes through its press—much of it original, much of it translations of the best that the revolutionary movements in other languages have produced—are standard in the English-speaking movement. They breathe the uncompromising spirit that American conditions render imperative to a Socialist Movement unless it is ready either to render itself ridiculous, or to betray the working class with revisionist flap-doodleism. Accordingly, the Socialist Labor Party never withholds a blow at Wrong lest it make

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an enemy, or lose a friend. It yields to no lures. If, in other countries conditions allow, or, perchance, require a different course, not so here: the Socialist Labor Party of America hews close to the line. In its war upon the capitalist class, the Party allows not itself to be used as a prop for that class: whether the capitalist formation appear in the shape of a Trust, or in that of a revamped bourgeois guild, sailing under the false colors of "Trades Unionism," the Party ruthlessly exposes both—IT EXPOSES BOTH—even though workingmen may hold stock in the former, the Trust, as the so-called Trades Union of the Amalgamated Iron and Steel Workers do in Carnegie's United States Steel Corporation; and even if it be workingmen who constitute the rank and file of the revamped bourgeois guilds sailing under the flag of Trades Unionism, and thereby keep the working class divided by the Chinese Walls of prohibitive high dues and initiation fees, or other guild practices, as many so-called Trades Unions do. The unflinching attitude imposed upon a bona fide party of Socialism in America is incomprehensible to the successive waves of alleged revolutionary movements and American reformers generally, who with the tenacity of a disease turn up and turn down on the country's political stage. Being incomprehensible to them, the Socialist Labor Party is the object of their violent animosity, and is successively pronounced dead by them,—on paper. The Socialists of Europe will understand this phenomenon when they are told that the identical epithets which the Millerand-Jaures revisionists of France bestow upon the Parti Socialiste de France (U.S.R.){?}—"ill-natured," "narrow," "intolerant," etc., etc.,—have been and continue to be bestowed with monotonous regularity by these American "revisionists" upon the Socialist Labor Party.

It is this "ill-nature," "narrowness," "intolerance," etc., that is urging on the day of the dethronement of the American capitalist class. At the time of the McKinley assassination in 1901, for instance, when the capitalist class tried to profit by the event to root up all impulse towards its overthrow, all voices with one exception, that had at all seemed in opposition to class rule, were silenced, they dared not utter themselves. That solitary exception was the voice of the Socialist Labor Party. Scores of its speakers were arrested and otherwise persecuted, yet they held their ground and

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triumphed over the attempt to throttle the voice of the proletariat. Capitalist development in America is now rapidly overtaking and overcoming the obstacles that Marx enumerated for the conservative form of the American bourgeois republic to enter upon its political revolutionary form. Things are ripening rapidly. When the day of the vote shall have arrived for the Socialist Movement of America that vote will be counted—or the men whom the Socialist Labor party is gathering and drilling WILL KNOW THE REASON WHY. The backwardness of the Socialist Movement in America is on the surface only. Whatever the thermometer of the Socialist vote, monkeyed with by capitalist corruption, may register, the temperature is rising.

The S.L.P. platform demands—and the Party's every act is in strict accordance with the demand—the unconditional surrender of the capitalist class; and the Party is guided exclusively by the Polar Star of the principle that the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself. The Party takes nothing less because it knows that anything less means Revisionism.

DANIEL DE LEON,

Delegate of the Socialist Labor Party of the United States of
America.

New York, July 15, 1904.

By order of the National Executive Committee, S.L.P.,

HENRY KUHN,
National Secretary.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor
Party of America.
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