
No Impossibilism for Us!

by Victor L. Berger

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Again we are challenged by the IWW element of our party — an element, most of whom are as ignorant as they are fanatical and hypocritical — not only for our stand towards the American Federation of Labor, which for all its weaknesses is in every way *preferable* to the IWW — but also because we always were in favor of a *working program* for our party and always will be.

Now even some people of that sort who lay claim to a little brains are opposed to a working program or *belittle* its value. Why? Well, they say, we can never accomplish anything as long as capitalism exists. And because any program means compromise with the middle class and is therefore treason. And because Hearst or Bryan might steal our thunder, and that would be the end of us.

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The first of these arguments — that nothing can be done under capitalism — we deny in toto.

A great deal has been done under capitalism for the laboring class and for humanity. And a great deal more must be done, or Socialism will never be possible.

As a matter of fact, we do not know much about the cooperative commonwealth, and none of us who have really studied Socialism and history care to describe it.

What interests *us* first, is the solution of those problems which Socialists must solve within the

present society.

Therefore, we are compelled to put forth and maintain the series of demands which form the working program of the Socialist platform. The Social Democratic Party is just a political *party*. If we were a mere sect, then we should only need a sort of confession of faith.

As a political party, which wishes above all things to represent the wage-working class, it is our first duty to take care that all the people who perform the useful and necessary labor shall be economically, morally, and physically strengthened, rescued from extreme poverty and made capable of resistance in body and spirit. Every success in this direction will naturally compel us to work for those demands which are not yet attained.

In this way, the present capitalist system — not without many dangers, and perhaps with repeated effusions of blood — will “*grow into*” (to use Liebknecht’s expression) the Socialistic system.

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As for the second argument, that all social reforms necessitate working with the middle class at certain times — and certain “*compromises*” as the DeLeonites would call it — that cannot be denied. But that is not treason, it is simply citizenship. *All politics* is compromise, because it means abiding by the will of the majority. And of course, we have *not* the majority.

No real *scientific* Socialist will accuse the *Social-Democratic Herald* of “*opportunism*” because

we believe in a policy of steady change very much in the social system per se, unless economic conditions (besides also the education and enlightenment of the people) are favorable towards a complete change.

Otherwise, we might simply change masters.

And we can truthfully say that some of the so-called Socialists we know personally and others perhaps that we do not know would be worse taskmasters than any the capitalist world has ever produced.

A moral, physical, and intellectual strengthening of the proletariat, and the formation of a *class alliance* with *farmers* of progressive views, we consider prerequisites, without which there is *no chance for Socialism*, even if “revolutions” do happen.

Moreover, as we have frequently pointed out in these columns, the *evolutionary* view which we stand for does not necessarily exclude a “bloody revolution,” or even a round dozen of them. For proof of this, take the revolutions and uprisings of the bourgeoisie against monarchs and feudalism.

In the world’s history, there are no sudden leaps. Today, more than 100 years after the bloody abolition of the nobility and the church in France “forever,” it was only the Socialists who saved the republic for the French people a few years ago from being overthrown by the nobles and the crozier.

Just so, or even *more* so, it will be with the social revolution, or rather, the social *revolutions*.

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And the silliest argument of all is the one that Hearst and Bryan “might steal our thunder.” If it can be stolen, it ought to be stolen. If Hearst and Bryan should steal our thunder, they are really welcome to it. But we do not believe that they can steal it. They might steal certain *phrases* — and especially, the phraseology of the IWW and the SLP is easily alienated, because it sounds big

and means nothing.

Besides, we, the Social Democrats, do not simply “want to make a noise like Socialists.” We actually want *to do something as Socialists*. We want to be constructive and build up, not only destructive and tear down.

Our Socialism is not thunder — not simply hot air — it is *lightning* that strikes, purifies, and enlightens the world.

Since the time of Prometheus, nobody has ever stolen genuine lightning.

According to the fable, Prometheus stole it, in order to teach men the art of making fire and laying the foundations of civilization. If a new Prometheus should steal the lightning of the “Socialist gods” to give it to men and thus build up a higher civilization, the writer, like an old heretic, would be one of the first men to follow.

But unfortunately, the Titans are all dead — Prometheus was the last.

Neither Billie Hearst nor Billie Bryan have a drop of Titanic blood in their veins.

But enough of mythology.

Some of us have little faith in heavens — either the ancient Greek, the modern Christian, or the future Socialist heaven.

With this declaration, we give hereby the Sergeant-at-arms of the “Socialist heaven” of the future the right to shut the door in our face, if we should ever apply for admission.

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Yet, because we are evolutionary Socialists, we should like to see a systematic way of *arming all the people*. Not for the sake of “*revolution*,” but for the sake of peace and progress.

An armed people are always a *free people*. Even the demagogues then would have a great deal less to say than they have today.

An armed people is always a *strong* people.

With the nation armed (as for instance, in Switzerland) reforms of all kinds are carried easily

and without bloodshed. With the nation armed, the proletariat could even trust *capitalist* parties with earnestly *desiring social reforms* and with earnestly carrying them out.

With the nation armed in a systematic way, the capitalist class need not fear any sudden uprisings. But with the nation armed, the workingmen are not in danger of being shot down like dogs at the least provocation.

On the other hand, we are absolutely in favor of the *Socialistic* reforms — “one step,” two steps, or six steps at a time — as many as we can make — and we are unalterably *opposed* to the impotent and good for nothing *REVOLUTIONARY PHRASES* and holy words that are the stock in trade of certain hypocritical or ignorant “Socialist” shouters.

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