
Shall We Commit Suicide?

Letter to the Editor of the *New York Call*, May 2, 1917.

by Job Harriman

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Editor of *The Call*:—

The Emergency Socialist Party Convention, recently held in St. Louis [April 7-14, 1917], has sent forth a proclamation which, in my opinion, is exceedingly unwise and extremely dangerous. The cause of the war are stated correctly and with great force. The policies to be pursued by the party during the war are stated with equal force, but are devoid of wisdom and are pregnant with unnecessary danger and dire consequences to our movement.

If the policy outlined by the convention is adopted by the party, it will lay the foundation for an attack upon our organization which will create consternation in our ranks throughout the land.

This document will support a charge of conspiracy to violate the federal statutes. The prison doors will open and gulp in our members by the thousands.

No good can come to the movement by such a course.

When we recommend to the workers, and pledge ourselves to, “continuous, active, and public opposition to the war through demonstrations, mass petitions, and all other means within our power,” and “to the support of all mass movements in opposition to conscription” if conscription laws are passed, we act in direct violation of the United States statute which provides that “if two or more persons in any state or territory conspire

to...oppose by force the authority of the United States, or by force to prevent, hinder or delay the execution of any law of the United states contrary to the authority thereof, [they] shall each be fined not more than \$5,000 or imprisoned not more than 6 years, or both.” If the party approves this position by a majority vote, the members will either have to back up, lie down, or go to jail. Whichever course they take will land them in a fool’s paradise.

The majority of the convention acted under great excitement and provocation, but it is hoped that the party will act more wisely.

A political party that cannot raise sufficient funds to finance its convention without borrowing money is hardly in a position to declare war on the government of the United States. That is precisely what the majority of the convention have proposed that the party do.

We opposed this country entering the war with all our power, but were powerless to prevent it. Now that we are in the war, this country will follow the same course that all belligerent national have traveled. Efficiency will force municipal, state, and national ownership and management of industries. War will empty the nation’s commissary. Starvation and devastation will curse every city and hamlet. And we who know best how to direct the movement for the nationalization of industry to this end that suffering may be alleviated and industries may be so organized that mutuality of interest in industrial and commercial

affairs may be substituted for the present competitive system, are advised to put ourselves in such a position that our services will be spurned, and that the people, who do not understand us, will turn against us and rend us. The working class will not understand our course.

This is not a labor war. Strikes may come and go, but the war will go on to the finish. We are all citizens of this country and the rules of war will be enforced. Wisdom, sagacity, and good judgment tell us to take advantage of the opportunity to forward our movement as far as possible by nationalizing our industries, while the government and the people are being forced by their economic needs in that direction.

It is for these reasons that I urge the party membership to vote for the minority report submitted by the dissenting 50, which gives their declaration of policy on the war.

Job Harriman.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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