
Separate Organizations

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A California comrade wants to know if it would not be better if the women joined in the mixed locals and worked with the men, instead of having separate organizations of their own.

In answer to this query I would say that much depends upon the circumstances, both of the women and of the locals. Under favorable conditions it no doubt is better to have the men and women work together in every phase of the Socialist movement.

By favorable conditions, I mean a group of women who are advanced sufficiently to be willing to work in the mixed locals, and a group of men who are sympathetic and responsive to those needs of women which lie outside their own. Given these conditions, and the mixed local is ideal.

But the masses of women are so backward, as far as any line of social progress is concerned, and especially in the matter of Socialism, that it is difficult to induce them in any appreciable numbers to attend the mixed locals, much less to join them. They need some sort of a preparatory school in which they may train for the more arduous work of the regular branch or local.

In the separate organization the most unsophisticated little woman may soon learn to preside over a meeting, to make motions, and to defend her stand with a little "speech." She has been used to talking and arguing with women all her life; she isn't self-conscious when enacting the business of a meeting before them. After a year or two of this sort of practice she is ready to work with men. And there is a mighty difference between working *with* the men, and simply sitting in obedient reverence under the shadow of their aggressive power. Women have done this thing all the centuries of their historical lives. If they are willing to continue it, what can one expect from them under the gentle and benign influence of a Socialist regime? If the terrors and oppressions of the present day are not sufficient to

drive them into cooperative activity for their welfare as a class, and as a sex, what will they do toward furthering the *public* weal when the Cooperative Commonwealth shall furnish them a home, and a husband who can make enough money to keep them in that home, warm and comfortable, without a great deal of exertion on their part, as some Socialist writers predict will be the case?

There is a very great deal that women need to learn about themselves, about their history, and the traditions of their sex. These things can best be learned, as a rule, in a separate organization, where the mind can be better centered upon the matter in hand. A woman's organization with alternate evenings devoted to business matters and to study, is a very good school for the average women seeking after the Socialist interpretation of life — feminine life, as well as masculine. The member of such an organization *must feel*, however, that their work is as essential to individual and social progress as is the work of any other progressive society. And perhaps a little more so, since women are especially in need of intellectual development to offset the highly emotional development which has been theirs throughout the ages.

These organizations for women are especially essential in those communities where the male members of the local branch are not particularly aggressive in their sympathies with the woman part of the Socialist philosophy. We have known instances where the local was made a sort of man's club — a place where men met and talked and smoked, and split hairs over unimportant technicalities, transacted a little business, talked and smoked some more, and adjourned until the next meeting's program, which consisted of practically the same line of procedure. Sometimes these locals have a series of lectures which are good for the advanced Socialist, but cannot appeal to the mere woman who is seeing for the first steps. To be sure there are always two or three faithful women who will stick with the organizations, and go their lonely way night after night to the meetings. But, if conditions were right, I believe there would not be a Socialist local anywhere that would not have a good attendance of women compared with the percentage of men attendants.

We have to meet these facts, however, and we have to manage, somehow, to get women interested in Socialism. It hasn't been done satisfactorily so far through the mixed local. It remains to be seen what can be done through separate organizations.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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