
The Question of Party Tactics:

A Joint Discussion of Party Affairs between C.W. Barzee of Portland, Former State Secretary of the Socialist Party of Oregon and Frans Bostrom of Tacoma, Former State Secretary of the Socialist Party of Washington.

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I. [Class Interest and Common Interest]

by C.W. Barzee

In entering this discussion of party affairs with Comrade Bostrom, it is understood that we are trying to arrive at a common understanding of the proper means for advancing Socialism and bringing about a more complete unity in the organized movement. This discussion suggested itself through the publication of the foregoing letter from Comrade Bostrom to J. Stitt Wilson, Sub-Committee of the National Executive Committee, under date of February 15, 1915.

Socialism as represented by the Socialist Party is a social policy applied politically to the social needs of society as a whole. Only indirectly does it relate to labor organizations as a factor for accomplishing its purpose and this same relation, to a degree, is known to exist in all political parties as is proven by the fact that all such parties claim, more or less, to represent the interests of labor, and this claim is substantiated by the further fact that a large majority of organized labor affiliates politically with them. The Socialist Party cannot, therefore, claim a political monopoly on organized labor.

Socialism does claim to have a political policy based on the scientific analysis of economics as applied to life and living which benefits not one part only, but **all** of that social unit that makes up human

civilization. If then, Socialism is scientific, from a political point of view, it must need follow that it cannot be diverted from its final destiny and that any step in that direction advances it accordingly.

Political Aim of the Socialist Party.

In respect to its necessities, society is a homogeneous mass having like needs and requirements. The different economic systems under which it has existed has destroyed this homogeneousness and the education, manner of living, etc. As a result, [this] makes one part of society at war with another part, to their common destruction, and leaves it entirely out of joint in its intersocial relations. the harmonious reestablishment of correct relations is the political demand of the Socialist Party.

Having thus a multitude of differing minds to deal with, a majority of which must be apprehended and consolidated into one political group, viz., the Socialist Party, it is the purpose of the organized movement to teach a common interest that will overcome all erroneous education politically, socially, and economically. It is herein conceded that only one certain part of society, from an economic viewpoint, i.e., the working class, is particularly susceptible to a comprehensive acceptance of the Socialist philosophy. Thus the approach presents, erroneously, from a class rather than a homogeneous viewpoint; hence the appeal to the working class for political affiliation, not for the supremacy of their class, as a class, but for the overthrow of all classes and a return to a homogeneous social relation of the common interest.

If this analysis be correct, what then is the duty of the Socialist Party members as individual workers? Is it not to teach a common interest as well as a special working class interest? Conceding this, the most practical plan for accomplishing this work should be the plan of the Socialist Party, and thus we have arrived at the parting of the ways — immediate demands in the national platform. We now pass to the plan of education set forth therein.

Question of Tactics.

A little forbearance right here might span a great chasm that is widening and dividing the organized movement into camps of warring individuals who have exactly the same objective.

If all minds were in exactly the same stage of evolution that which would convince one would convince all. If all were of the same education as Comrade Bostrom and myself, we might say that tomorrow we will begin the operation of the cooperative commonwealth. But, as state, previous environment and the education that came with it demand that different tactics be used to bring different-minded individuals to a common understanding.

I meet a person with whom I desire to discuss this question in a convincing manner. There is just one condition by which this may be accomplished, viz., by apprehending them in the fullest sense of that word. I must speak in a language that he can understand and that which interests him. While this person may have working class psychology, he may have Republican, Democratic, Prohibition, or Progressive (I believe there are a few extant) political affiliations; but he must be informed and taken into the Socialist Party if the party is to succeed politically.

Was This Plank Justified?

Too many Socialist propagandists speak in language not understood. They fire their shots entirely over the mark, or fail to reach it. In either case we have failed and nothing comes of our effort. In Oregon (1914 election), the Socialist Party put out a [ballot] measure to form a Department of Industry and Public Works. It was generally conceded to be a Socialist measure; though, in reality, it was but state capitalism or what is commonly called state socialism. It got the attention and votes of about 58,000 citizens. Much prejudice must have been removed and some education acquired to get so large a vote when the average for our candidates was less than 18,000. As a result, 40,000 citizens favorably considered Socialist propaganda, and many others must have seriously reviewed it, as all the votes cast for and against the measure was 26,000 less than the total vote of the state. Inasmuch, then as thinking and study is the means by which knowledge must be increased, did the Oregon Socialist Party do right or wrong in putting out that measure? Was this misapplied energy or did it tend to educate the citizens of Oregon in matters that would lead them to a better understanding of Socialism?

C. W. Barzee.

II. Utopianism versus Revolutionary Socialism

by Frans Bostrom

In order to be able to arrive at any result whatever, it is always necessary in a debate that the two opponents start out from one common premise. Thereafter each statement of fact made by either must be accepted by the other, before it can be used in building up the argument. Beliefs, traditions, commonly accepted opinions have no value in an argument, only facts, scientific truths. And the premises laid down by Comrade Barzee are not facts. Society is not homogeneous, the interests of individual members of it are not, have never been, and can never be identical.

As an entity one society may have a common interest as against another society. At any rate, the law of self-preservation applies to societies as well as to individuals. There is no instance in history of any society in which there was not a class struggle. Communism never prevailed in any society. The tribe was but an enlargement of the family. I here consider the word **society** as identical with the word **state**, which coincides with Comrade Barzee's use of the terms.

Function of the State.

The state was originally an alliance of slave owners for the common defense against invaders and for the convenient subjugation of their slaves. "A harmonious reestablishment of correct relations," to use the comrade's phrase, is therefore not our goal, since we have no desire to go backward and reestablish anything.

In all history, the class which was most concerned in the readjustment of the affairs of the state, was the one which brought it about. Appeals to the fair mindedness and generosity of the governing class has never given results, nor has the promise of heaven and the fear of hell. The fact that lenient masters have existed proves nothing, nor millionaire Socialists. To quote Tolstoy: "The masters will do anything for the workers except getting off their backs." The workers, being always miserable, "having always the world to gain and nothing to lose," have always been ready for the revolution, whenever it suited "their betters" to rebel, and have always been left in the lurch when

the victory had been achieved. It is time for the workers to cease to be the catspaw of another class.

“Equal Opportunities.”

Every revolution has so far been for equal opportunities. In other words, it has been a revolt of the clever ones against the monopoly of inherited power. Whenever in any social development the ruling class has been sufficiently established to become arrogant, it closes the door of opportunity and refuses admittance to upstarts. Then the trouble begins. The slaves get leaders. The bribery of promotion not being offered to the more intelligent of the mob, they get restless and demand a change. They turn to the mutts, the Jimmie Higgenses,¹ for aid. Any Jimmy responds, always. And when the victory is won, and the door for advancement is opened, the clever ones step in and pull the door after them and leave Jimmie in the cold, holding the sack.

The revolutionary Socialist wants equal opportunities to earn a living, he wants an absolutely certain job. He can not prevent the smart guy from becoming a leader, in fact he doesn't want to, but he wants to prevent him from selling out. His leader in the future will not be self-appointed, shall not compromise with the enemy, but must let his own emancipation depend upon the emancipation of the whole working class.

Our Platform Sops.

The class struggle is recognized in the national constitution [of the Socialist Party] and the sops offered in the national platform to the petty middle class is a violation of said constitution, of fundamental principles, of common sense and decency, and is a testimonial to the dishonesty and inefficiency of opportunism.

To appeal to any class for fairness, justice, generosity, or mercy is utopian. To appeal to anyone for votes for Socialism under any other pretext than of absolute overthrow of capitalism is opportunism, which is a polite name for humbug. Voting is but the counting of noses. We want to know how strong we are. For force alone rules,

¹ “Jimmie Higgins” is a reference to a fictional character created by Socialist writer Ben Hanford — a prototypical rank-and-file “grunt worker” whose selfless performance of mundane tasks was heralded as the real backbone of any effective political movement.

now and always. And we should beware from getting a false count. Let well meaning gentle folks join us to satisfy whims or ease their consciences, but let them remember that this is **our** movement and we must guide its course.

Frans Bostrom.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport

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