
As to Disrupters:

Letter to the Editor of *The New York Call*, March 25, 1917.

by William M. Feigenbaum

Published in *The New York Call Magazine*, March 25, 1917, pg. 10.

Editor of the Forum:

Jack Carney has undertaken to say a word or two about the matters that I spoke of in my recent letter to the Forum. I do not want to start a controversy, and I am not going to. But I am going to clear up a couple of matters and let it go at that.



Carney is especially well qualified to deal with the Socialist Party of America and its diseases and symptoms thereof by a close and intensive study of conditions here during the course of something less than a year that he has lived here. At least, when I met him in July [1916] he gave the impression of being a very recent arrival. And even at that time he displayed the eagerness and the avidity to diagnose and prescribe for the party that is usually born of a sublime ignorance of party affairs.

Briefly, Carney — and others who have spoken to me — question my statement that, of all the destructive critics of the party who have arisen at two periods in recent years, all but one have been disrupters, consciously or unconsciously. And

the one that I excepted was A.M. Simons.

I will explain even at the risk of hurting the feelings of some. The two periods that I refer to are the months from the Indianapolis convention to, let us say, November 1913, and the months just before the election of 1916 up to the present.

In the former period, the question was — stated very broadly — syndicalism. The agitation for a “revolutionary” unionism had led very many members into the ranks of an organization that was driven by the logic — or the illogic — of its philosophy into the position and practice of the most conservative and the most reactionary unions of the world. And we had a regular “propaganda league,” although not openly avowed, within the party, nominating candidates for committees in conventions, nominating slates for office, and building up a veritable machine within the party.

We all remember that — except those intrepid souls who have solved all our difficulties in a 2 weeks’ residence in the country. And my claim was at that time and is now that virtually every one of the persons who worked in the movement to “revolutionize” (save the mark!) the party was a conscious or unconscious disrupter. It is a bit too late to discuss this; but, if any comrade wants to dispute me, I will argue it with him in person, naming names of men and women most of whom are out of the party now, many of whom have long ago been discredited, some of whom have

openly and cowardly retracted their “principles” in a whining attempt to get out of jail. And most of whom, too, showed their devotion by “free-lancing” on the streets, collecting vast sums, blackguarding the party and discrediting our work.

I held and I hold that there was a well-defined attempt to sabotage the party, and every old-timer — not recent arrivals — knows it. But the time was ripe for our work, and we prospered in spite of disrupters. The successes we won in 1912 and 1913 were in spite of their disruptive work.

With reference to the present crisis, I assert this: That there has been a vast deluge of advice about “temporarily transferring” our support from Socialism to another party, and the persons who advised that, and who hinted at it, and who urged it, are disrupters in that they suggested things that, when performed — that is, when votes were cast — actually disrupted by lessening our vote just when we most needed a powerful vote. And those persons are very largely the ones who most severely criticize the party for not keeping its strength. And it is a bit peculiar that just those who criticize us when we grow in numbers for becoming too strung, and thus becoming diluted as to our pure revolutionism, are the very ones who read the riot act when we lose votes and display — to them — the fact that we are losing our pure revolutionism.

But when it occurs to one to hold these people up as conscious or unconscious disrupters, the name of Simons occurs as a caustic critic. And, although Simons was the one who first criti-

cized most vigorously, it cannot be said that he is anything but a loyal, true-blue Socialist. And so I excepted him, because to classify him with the others would be unjust to him and untrue. Virtually every other caustic critic, however, contributed to the decline of our strength.

As for the others, it is hard to escape from the conclusion that practically all of them have other loves that come before their devotion to Socialism and the party. Their history shows it. Their actions prove it. And a comparison with the good work of their syndicalistic precursors of 1912 and 1913 strengthens one in the belief.

And, finally, Jack Carney challenges me to reveal my stand, as if that is of any importance. Well, Jack, here goes. The terrible secret is unveiled. I stand for a 100%, undiluted, unhyphenated, undivided, unswerving devotion to the Socialist movement. I stand for it, and have stood for it for 15 years, and I have lived it every moment of those years. I am read to criticize and to suggest changes. I am ready to take any step that is needed to advance our cause. I am ready to fight for Socialism.

Can it be said that those who strove with might and main in 1912 and 1913, and again in 1916, to scatter the strength of our movement are as loyal?

Faternally,

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Brooklyn.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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