
The Socialistic Labor Party in 1886

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This party, founded originally by the Germans, now numbers many thousands of members of all nationalities in America. The men of its earlier days — F.A. Sorge and others — are beginning to reap at last their deserved reward. This organization, with its German, American, Scandinavian branches throughout the states differs from all others in certain important points.

1. Long before any of the others the Socialists understood that there was a labor question, and understood what that question really was. Thus they have been, unconsciously to their scholars in many cases, the teachers of the working class.

2. They state clearly that society is made up of only two classes — “that of the workers and that of the great bosses.”

3. They formulate clearly their demands that the land, the instruments of production (machines, factories, etc.), and the products of labor become the property of the whole people.

4. They announce sufficiently their means: “to realize our demands we strive to gain control of the political power with all proper means.”

5. They are in alliance with the Socialistic Labor Party of Europe.

What are the relations of the Socialistic Labor Party to the other organizations of America? In the first place, the vast majority of its members are also members of one or more of these organizations; and only a few, not understanding the position of the movement in America, hold aloof from the Knights or Central Labor Unions. As a consequence, these other organizations are becoming, to a constantly increasing extent, infiltrated with Socialism, and slowly their vague, indefinite aspirations and ideas are becoming formu-

lated in terms of that science. With this the individual Knights and Unionists are being gradually brought over, not only to the understanding of Socialism, but to open declarations of themselves as Socialists and as members of the SLP.

The complete bringing about of these desirable results is delayed by two things chiefly. One is the distrust of Socialism held until recently by the average American working man — a distrust born of his ignorance of its principles, its aims, its methods. Most K of L, for example, protest strongly against being called Socialists. The other impediment lies in some of the German Socialists themselves. A few of these, as already hinted, not understanding the movement generally, and still less understanding it in America, are anxious to “boss the show” in that country. As long as that is possible, the movement in America will not be American. Socialism, to be effective there, must be of native growth, even if the seeds are brought from other countries.

That is, whilst the Germans will in the future, as in the past, direct the thoughts of their fellow-workers, and suggest ideas to them, they will have to be content after a time to stand aside, and let the so-called leadership of the movement pass into the hands of the English-speaking peoples. The most clearheaded Germans in America quite see this. Their work has been, is, and still will be, to teach and to initiate organization. But already their American brethren, under their tuition, are organizing for themselves on the basis of Socialism. From the moment this is the case, the policy and duty of the Germans are to withdraw into the background, and whilst never relaxing in energy, or ceasing to inspire from within, to let the forefront of the movement be American. •