

The Social Crusaders (February 4, 1903)

The action recently taken by the State Executive Committee of Colorado relative to the comrades who have engaged in the propaganda of socialism in the name of "The Social Crusade" is ill-advised, in my opinion, and calculated not only to do injustice to the comrades in question, but to provoke resentment and introduce unnecessary discord in the party councils throughout the state.

Although not a resident of Colorado and rarely obtruding myself in a matter of this kind, I have a special interest in the socialist movement in the Rocky Mountain states, and it has seemed to me that Colorado in particular presented a most inviting field for socialist propaganda and promised to be one of the first states, if not the very first, to win out for socialism.

It is in no spirit of dictation that I now write, but because I feel deeply upon the subject; and this must justify my motive in protesting against what I regard as an unfortunate precedent, as well as a great injustice to a body of men who have done more than any others in equal number to spread the light of socialism in the western states.

I am not impugning the honesty of the state committee, but I decidedly question their judgment in pronouncing "condemnation" upon a body of men whose only crime is that they propose to work for socialism in their own way. I do not understand that they have asked the state committee to endorse them; why should the committee feel called upon to condemn them?

All over Colorado there are socialists, clear-headed and class-conscious, who were first set to thinking and who first had their eyes opened by J. Stitt Wilson. Is it for this that the state committee "condemns" him?

If the state committee had anything against Wilson and his co-workers, would it not have been nearer right to call their attention to the fact and give them a chance to defend themselves?

The state committee errs in the first instance in declaring that the social crusade is organized in "opposition" to the Socialist Party. The Crusade has from the start actively supported the Socialist Party, organizing locals,

addressing meetings, distributing literature, and doing all that could be done to build up and make strong the party throughout the state.

There are scores of socialist clubs and independent societies all over the country, organized to aid in the socialist propaganda, thereby recruiting for the Socialist Party. Would the executive committee of Colorado wipe them all out because they choose their own way of working for socialism?

Now note the contradiction of the committee: After declaring against the Crusaders for having an alleged "opposition" organization, they "condemn" them for "maintaining a separate organization within the state party." The committee was evidently confused. The Crusade, so-called, is neither an opposition organization, nor is it maintaining a separate organization within the state party. The Crusade simply consists of a few men with ideals who have become convinced that socialism is right and have resolved to consecrate their lives to it; and in my judgment these men have done more to dispel prejudice, get socialism rightly before the people, and build up the Socialist Party than any other equal number of men in the country.

These men happen to have served in the ministry. I am certainly not prejudiced in their favor on that account. But I have been in their footsteps, with and around and among them, and, knowing of their work, I would be mean indeed to see such an injustice done them without at least lifting my voice in protest.

It has been almost ten years since a minister called on me in Chicago and invited me to occupy his pulpit and tell his congregation something about the labor question.

The church never forgave him; I never forget him. His name was J. Stitt Wilson.

Five years ago I was to speak on socialism in the quiet, conservative college town of Greencastle, Indiana. The people were all strangers, or their hands were raised against me. A young minister invited me to his home and I ate bread with his family that evening. That was William H. Wise, and I have loved him ever since.

There is not a Crusader who could not occupy a pulpit and live a life of ease. Why do they give up position, leave home, part family ties, and take up the burden of their deep convictions? Because they are men of moral courage and intellectual honesty. Why should any socialist condemn them? Why?

Let us call the roll: J. Stitt Wilson, William H. Wise, Carl D. Thompson, Frank H. Wentworth, Ben Wilsom. What one of them is preaching “doubtful socialism?” What one of them does not stand squarely on the class struggle? What one of them is not working tooth and nail for the Socialist Party?

Let me make a proposition that I regard as a fair test of the case. To determine if the “doubtful socialism” is one the one side or the other, let the state committee call a meeting of socialists and invite one of the Crusade, say Carl D. Thompson, to appear on behalf of the Crusaders. If he does not make it clear that he knows at least as much about the literature and science of socialism as his advisors, if he does not prove by the verdict of the audience that he is an able, eloquent, and altogether worthy advocate of the principles of international socialism, of which the movement has every reason to be proud, I will make my apologies to the state committee.

The trouble with some men is they must “judge” other men and “condemn” them if they don’t conform to their contracted ideas. They talk about “revolutionary socialism” and “opportunism;” these and a few other stock phrases complete their vocabulary. Some of them have never read a standard work on socialism; do not understand its true philosophy — and yet presume to pronounce the decree of banishment upon others of clearer vision and larger grasp who don’t happen to do things in ways to suit them.

Such men may organize a sect, but never a party; they may mean well and usually do, but they are too fanatic and intolerant to develop a great movement. The worst of all is that they imagine themselves “revolutionary.” They are in fact quite the reverse; such influence as they have is wholly reactionary.

I believe the socialists of Colorado will agree with me that the Crusaders are men of brains, animated by the purest motives, and that their labors in and for the socialist movement have been as unselfish as any service ever rendered the cause by any other comrades; and this being true, they are entitled to the respect and goodwill of the party.

No comrade who knows William H. Wise as he is would condemn him or recommend that the party ignore his correspondence. He literally gave up all he had for the socialist movement, and privation has often been his lot and that of his family, for this reason purely and no other. he can forget himself as completely to serve a cause as any man I have ever known. He is a socialist to the core of his heart; not a sentimental one, but

thoroughly scientific, and therefore revolutionary in the genuine sense of that greatly misused term. And so are all his co-workers.

In conclusion I hope the state committee will upon maturer consideration rescind their decree. There is a better way to deal with this matter than with "condemnation proceedings."

Let the state committee invite the Crusaders to meet with them and talk it over, and I am confident that there will be no difficulty in finding the right way out. Otherwise there will be factional strife and possibly party disruption.

The prospect in Colorado is too fine to be shattered. It would be a pity, if not a calamity.

Most earnestly do I hope that reasonable counsels may prevail; that justice may be done, and that the party in Colorado may press forward with unbroken columns to glorious victory.

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