
Speech to the Founding Convention of the Workers Party of America.

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Comrades:

The first convention of the Workers Party of America meets at a time when the working-class movement of this country is in a state of flux; when all elements are groping for something that will point the way out of the labyrinth of unemployment and general misery in which they find themselves.



liberators in this country, Washington freed us from the English and Lincoln he freed the slaves; Thomas Edison freed the tired piano players and Henry Ford freed the horses. Now comes President Harding and frees the working man from hard labor. Ain't but very few of them got work now."

The story is very funny but it shows that even those who been fooled for years are becoming tired and suspicious of the propaganda of the spokesmen of the ruling class. In particular is this true of the members of the trade union movement of the United States. It is unfortunate that at this time, when a wonderful opportunity presents itself, that our first task must be to under the mistakes of the past. The revolutionists in this country have not thought it necessary to familiarize themselves with a technique, mechanism and structure of the trade union movement.

The unemployment nationwide its character, that has followed the war-time prosperity during which everyone could find a job making the machinery with which the workers were murdering one another in Europe, has forced the workers to think. So serious is this condition that even the Montana cowboys at the expense of tremendous mental effort are pondering over this problem.

I was talking with one the other day on a train coming up from Salt Lake City. We were discussing politics and he said: "My county went Republican last year, but they're sorry they did now, and I heard a fellow making some remarks about that down in Tulsa the other day. He said we'd had some great

They did not think it worthwhile because they were going to destroy it; but it is still here and in it, we are forced to admit are the more intelligent workers of this country.

Now, the value of a propagandist is measured by two things; the quality of his propaganda and the number of people he can talk to. Here in the United States it has become a most sacred custom, hallowed by time, for a revolutionist, when he differed with others, on questions of tactics and also when he could not put his own views across in the organization to which he belonged, to promptly form

an organization of his own, where everything he said would meet with wonderful applause. So the movement here in America has failed to realize that outside of the very small groups who preached the class struggle there was this great mass of organized and unorganized workers, to whom the message must be carried if the revolution was going to be anything else but a debating society. Now, what does it mean when we talk of working in the labor movement? Does it mean getting a leaflet printed and distributing it? Not all. Does it mean that you're going to call mass meetings for members of the trade unions and depend upon conditions to force them to come to your meetings? Nothing of the sort. It means that if you are going to work in the trade union movement and work in a manner that will win the organized workers of this country to the cause of the social revolution, you've got to go into the unions and talk with the workers and not to them. Now, there isn't any glory to be gained in this kind of work. The spotlight is not going to play on the men and women that are doing this and there isn't any particular pleasure in it. I know there isn't. I have been in the trade union movement for 12 years, and it is nothing but hard, dirty, monotonous work; but the only way you can beat the reactionary bureaucrats who now dominate most of the trade unions is to prove to the membership of those unions that you are more efficient than they are. It cannot be done merely by destructive criticism. It does not mean anything to the working-class of this country when you say that a labor leader is reactionary. Most of them do not even understand the dictionary definition of the term, and they are perfectly satisfied with the present leadership so long as that leadership can now and then gain advantages for them. If you're going to go into the trade unions, you have got to go in as bonafide members of those organizations and not with the idea of that by one or two speeches on the international situation, which, by the way, the bureaucracy won't allow you to make, you're going to capture a trade union.

Let me give you a concrete illustration to show what cleaning out a bureaucracy means. We started in about five years ago in Butte, Montana, and at that time the officialdom of the labor movement of that city and state was not merely reactionary. Four-fifths of the officials were actually on the payroll of the Ana-

conda Mining Company, protected by the legal and extra-legal machinery of that corporation. It took four years of unceasing endeavor to oust that officialdom. Now, when you oust them, what have you got? You have not got revolutionary organizations and you won't have. You will merely have organizations where you will have freedom to carry on your work of education, and it seems to me that that is enough. That is all that any movement of this kind needs, and opportunity, if it is the movement it is supposed to be.

There is no doubt in the mind of anyone who has familiarized himself with the situation that present conditions call for entirely new tactics, entirely new viewpoints, entirely new policies. We can only judge the efficiency of any organization, the manner in which it meets conditions, by results. Now, we have had in this country for many years parliamentary socialist movements. Many of their members were also members of the trade unions, but what did they do in the trade unions? They told the members of the trade unions the thing that was necessary for the emancipation of the workers was not to scab at the ballot box, that by being politically conscious on Election Day the workers could free themselves; and all their activities in the trade unions were devoted to gathering votes for the program of the party. Now, if this organization should by any chance conceive that that is its mission in the trade unions, it will meet with the same fate that has overtaken the Socialist Party of America and will divorce itself from the working-class of the United States just as successfully as that organization has. The organized workers of this country are not politically conscious, never have been, and they will be only when they are trained to look at political action not merely from the standpoint of the politician, of the man who runs for office, of election campaigns, but from the standpoint of the class-conscious worker, who knows that anything that tends to weaken the power of the ruling class is a political act, and that has never been made clear to the workers of the United States; and because parliamentary action and political action had been confused, there sprang up in the United States the movement that went to the opposite extreme of the Socialist Party — the Industrial Workers of the World, who negated any kind of political action. Now, this organization, despite the fact that its membership was never large, has exercised tremendous influence

upon the movement in this country, and it is a mistake, a bad mistake, to think the contrary. To date, I venture to say, two-thirds of the membership of the Industrial Workers of the World and two-thirds or more of the individuals who have passed through that organization but today are not members, are in sympathy with the aims and purposes of the organization that is being formed here, and these individuals are the very cream of the revolutionary elements in this country. They're the cream because they have the one thing without which any movement is not worth a tinker's dam, and that is courage. They may not be so clear on the fine points of Marxian theory as some of our comrades, but they do know what it is to fight the boss and his henchman, and the power of the state, when the enemy has 1000 percent the best of it. Now these elements must be attracted to this movement. That dauntless spirit must be mobilized into this organization, and it will be. It will be, provided that we do not become so intellectually proud, so confident that our own position is correct that we're not able to see that the viewpoint of these other elements has been formed by circumstances surrounding them through long periods of struggle and that they cannot be changed entirely overnight. I'm confident that the movement that is forming here is going to attract to itself the elements necessary for its success, but do not let us be so confident that we're not willing to acknowledge that we too can make mistakes and have made them in the past, as we all know. It is much different when you get out farther west — and, contrary to the prevailing opinion here, there is a large portion of the United States that lies west of Cleveland, Ohio, and west of the Mississippi River. The lines have always been more closely drawn there. The issue has been more clean-cut than is in this city, particularly for the reason that in the industrial communities of the West there is generally only one corporation with which the workers have to deal, and that one corporation controls all the political and industrial activities in that community. And so in the town in which I live there are only two kinds of people. You are either for the company or against the company. That is the way they judge. The corporation developing in the West, coming into communities more or less lawless, new and raw, found it very, very easy to get absolute control — the judicial, executive and legislative machinery — and

they still keep it. The workers in the mines and lumber woods can see that the boss is their enemy. The issue is not befogged. It is clear cut because wherever they turn they run against the same influence and for that reason the struggles in the industrial districts of the West have been very bitter, very bloody, and out of these struggles has grown a consciousness, a class-consciousness, that finds its expression in a hatred of everything that savors of an attempt to gloss over capitalism, to gloss over its evils or to compromise with that in any respect.

I know that if I were to tell you some of the things we had to do in Montana in order to live, in order to exist, you would not believe me. So I am not going to tell you. But this much I can say. The labor moment in Montana, when we did gain partial control of it, started a newspaper in a stronghold of the Anaconda Mining Co. and that newspaper was published and continued to exist simply because the workers in that community armed themselves; formed a Red Guard, if you want to call it that, and served notice upon the Anaconda Mining Co. and its gunmen that any attempt to wreck the plant would be met with reprisals; and for four weeks at a time 30 to 40 armed men slept in the composing room and the office of the *Butte Bulletin*, had their sentries out covering eight city blocks, threw out lines of communication, did everything but dig trenches. And so the paper kept on being published, but it was only published because the mercenaries of the corporation knew that there was a penalty attached to an attack on the plant. It was raided once. That was before we got wise to ourselves. Now, that is not quite as simple as it sounds. You must understand that these men who do this thing knew that if they killed in self-defense, a thousand chances to one they would hang if they escaped death by other means. They were just common working men, miners, lumberjacks, some of them trade unionists, some members of the Industrial Workers of the World, and some belonged to nothing but the human race — and the company papers even used to question that. Now, there has been nothing done in the mining and lumber districts, the Rocky Mountain region and the Pacific Coast, nothing done of a constructive nature that has not been backed by a movement of that kind. The effect of this has been to build up a fighting spirit in the working-class of that district, to convince them

that they will never get anything from capitalism except what they're able to take; and they are not fooled when some official, government or otherwise, pretends and assumes a friendly attitude towards the workers. They know these pretenses always end, providing the workers are lulled, in the removal of some of the privileges and concessions that they have gained through years of struggle. It is this psychology that must be taken into consideration by this organization if this organization is going to grow and become an influence in the western part of the United States

We are meeting here in security, in fancied security. At least we have not been bothered so far, and no gathering of radicals in the last two years has been molested to any great extent by volunteer raiding parties; and we say the sentiment is getting better. We say that the hysteria is dying down, but is that true? Don't we also think of the men who met and fought when the hysteria was at its height? I know when the hysteria began to die down. I know when it became somewhat unfashionable to raid gatherings of workers, and it happened immediately after members of the Industrial Workers of the World, in Centralia, Washington, defended themselves against an Armistice Day parade, that broke ranks and attacked and their hall; and all over this broad United States rebels of all shades of opinion meet without molestation today under the protection of the spirit of Wesley Everest. We do not want to forget that. None of these white collared mobs have been quite so enthusiastic since that occurrence about breaking into halls and breaking up meetings, because like the gunmen of the Anaconda Mining Co., they have begun to believe that there is a penalty at-

tached to that sort of thing. Of course, bloodshed is always deplorable. It is a terrible thing for men and women to have to die when life is sweet of, but it is all this better to die fighting than it is to be kicked to death by madmen. (*applause*) And so, when we are considering the program of the future and the elements with which we must deal, let us remember that many of us are here today simply because these workers were not afraid to die.

And another thing — the committee is here and as I am only filling until they get here, I'm going to finish quickly, but another thing occurs to me. I notice that even among the comrades there's a tendency now to be sort of philosophical about the Russian Revolution, to say, "Oh, well, things are not going quite as rapidly as we want them to go, and perhaps mistakes are being made over there." It is becoming somewhat fashionable to believe that some sort of capitalism is springing up in Russia and that it may strangle the revolution. There is quite a difference. Yesterday we sat here waiting for something or somebody and were singing "Hold the Fort" but in Russia the comrades have captured the fort and are holding it and that is the difference. (*applause*) It may be true that they have abandoned some of the outer bastions. Yes, and why? Because the reinforcements that they expected from the comrades of other nations did not come. But within the inner walls is the Communist Party of Russia and they are holding the fort, and they are going to hold it, comrades, until you and I and the rest of the world's workers come to their relief; and as long as they hold the inner walls the world revolution is safe and so is the Russian Revolution. (*prolonged applause*)

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