
The Socialist Labor Party and the Socialist Party: The Fundamental Differences Between the Two Organizations

by Mary Rantz

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Mr. S. Riviles,
Wilmington, Pa.

Dear Sir:—

Your card, with question, “What is the difference between the Socialist Party and the Socialist Labor Party?” was received. It was not answered sooner because I am a very busy person, and as this question requires a long and careful reply, I have been compelled to postpone it until an hour’s leisure could be had.

Now, then, what is the difference? To put it very briefly, it is the difference between Reform and Revolution. No matter what the Socialist Party may pretend to be, an examination of its history, its documents, its press, its convention proceedings, its National, State, and Municipal programs, all show it to be a party of reform.

Knowledge and experience have demonstrated that no reform under capitalism can be of any benefit to the working class as a whole, and that person, or be it party, that pretends to stand for Socialism, which means the abolition of wage slavery, and yet advocates reform, kicks, as one of our speakers put it recently, his own philosophy to pieces.

That the Socialist Party is a reform party not dif-

fering much in its utterances, programs, and methods from the capitalist reformer of the Hearst or Gibboney type, I shall prove later on. Just now I wish to go into a little bit of history which will reveal the great differences between the two parties. To know the mission of a movement, we must find out the causes which gave it birth; what situations it arose to meet.

Up to 12 years ago, there was but one Socialist organization in America. It was the Socialist Labor Party, which had been in the political field since 1890.† No more that a human being comes into this world possessed with knowledge, but must acquire, assimilate, and develop with growth and experience, does a movement start out with a complete grasp of facts and conditions. At first the movement was colored by Utopianism. It had many bitter experiences to go through and many hard lessons to learn before it stood upon the solid ground of sound, scientific Socialist knowledge. The Socialist Labor Party of America, after years of valuable experience, came to the correct conclusion that the only hope for a peaceful solution to the Labor Problem in America was the industrial organization of the workers on the economic field to supplement and give power to the revolutionary ballot of the workers.

You know, recently, when Victor Berger, the man who is so pitifully and foolishly trying to represent Socialism in Congress, was asked, “Suppose your ballots

†— The Socialist Labor Party actually was established on July 19, 1876, as the Workingmen’s Party of the United States. It changed its name to “Socialistic Labor Party” at its subsequent national convention, held in December 1877. In party myth the organization was reborn in 1890 — the year which, not coincidentally, Daniel DeLeon came into the ranks of the organization.

do not accomplish the Socialist Republic, what then?" his answer was, "If we cannot accomplish it with our ballots, we will use bullets." He, not wishing to recognize, or, perhaps, stupidly, not realizing the value and functions of Industrial Unionism, his answer is readily understood. Pure and simple ballotism without the force of industrial organization to sustain and back it up, can end only in bullets.

The growing intelligence of the Socialist Movement in America manifested itself in the Convention of the SLP in 1896 (get the proceedings of this 9th Convention and read them) by the almost unanimous adoption of the principle of revolutionary unionism. At that convention the Socialist Trade & Labor Alliance, whose mission was to organize all the workers of no matter what craft, color, or creed into one integral union, was endorsed.

So we see that in the year 1896 the Socialist Labor Party came out and declared itself for the only possible program that can bring in the Cooperative Commonwealth. From that day until the year 1899, the forces of reaction within the movement worked for the destruction of the Socialist Labor Party of America. (I would recommend to you the reading of the 10th Convention of the SLP for the firsthand information of the events of these days.) Then in the year of 1899, in July I think, the crisis came and the party was torn asunder over this question, this important question of participation in the revolutionary economic organization of the working class.

The men mainly instrumental in bringing about this state of chaos were nearly all of them men who had interests, material and otherwise, in the American Federation of Labor, which organization is at last being revealed to the workingmen and women of America as the greatest enemy to the working class, and the greatest obstacle to working class progress in this country. This fact was even in those early days very clear to the revolutionary element in the movement, but the renegade element with interests in the American Federation of Labor tore the movement asunder, the so-called Socialist Party came into existence, bolstering up and upholding the American Federation of Labor, and doing so to the present day.

This Socialist Party in its convention of 1904 drafted a resolution which called upon that party to condemn the Civic Federation, an organization created

by Mark Hanna as a means to chloroform the workers and keep them in subjection, and upon whose board side by side with the greatest exploiters of labor in America, sit our big "Labor Leaders." The Socialist Party, true to its nature, compromised and temporized with this "delicate question." At this convention, the SP adopted its position of "Neutrality" on the question of economic organization. And in the 1908 Convention and the 1910 Congress, the SP, by a large majority, reaffirmed this indefensible position. As if neutrality is possible on a question that concerns the very life-blood of the workers. Neutrality on this question in this critical age of the Labor Movement in America, is criminal, and any party that pretends to represent the workers and takes that position, deserves only the scorn and contempt of the working class.

Now, then, as you will have gathered, the main point of difference between the two parties, the point upon which the "split" occurred and which still divides the two movements, is this question of revolutionary economic organization. The Socialist Party claims that the ballot and politics alone are sufficient to usher in the Socialist Commonwealth, and then it proceeds towards this goal "a step at a time," these "steps" being issues which drain the energy, time, and money of the workers, without containing one benefit for them. The Socialist Labor Party states the correct position, THAT THE BALLOT ALONE is AN EMPTY, FUTILE thing, and can have no effect but the absolute demoralization of the working class, unless it has behind it the REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION of the workers in the ECONOMIC FIELD. The SLP does not state that the economic is more important, nor that the political is more important, but that BOTH are necessary to the Labor Movement, as the right arm is to the left and the left to the right; that while the political arm is organizing and functioning to capture and abolish capitalist government, the economic arm is organizing and forming the future industrial administration of things within the shell of the present capitalist system, by drilling the workers for the purpose of taking and holding those sources and means from which the life of society flows.

Now, there are other differences, without taking into consideration the corruption of the SP, or the graft that exists within its party machinery, proof of which I would rather not waste time on, because the

Socialist Party can be found wanting in the weighing of its principles alone. Without taking into consideration these things, I want to point out this not widely known or appreciated fact, that the Socialist Party has no party-owned press. The newspapers and periodicals published by the SP are all privately owned by corporations which drain the party membership of their pennies, nickels, and dimes, ask of them donations, sell to them their stocks and bonds, BUT NEVER SUBMIT TO THEM A REPORT OF THEIR FINANCES. If you do not believe this, I refer you to one of their own documents. Take the proceedings of their last convention in Chicago in 1910; turn to page 309, and there you will see a resolution which was put up by one of those members not satisfied with the way things are going within the organization. This resolution called upon these privately owned papers, which live on the money of the working class, to make semi-annual or annual reports of all finances. This resolution was UNFAVORABLY REPORTED. It was not even allowed to come to a vote.†

The Socialist Party cannot bring its papers to an account. But the SP has not a very great desire to do so, for it does not repudiate any of its papers, even when an extraordinary flagrant act has been committed. I have not yet heard of the SP having repudiated the “millionaire” Wilshire’s “Magazine” for its part in floating “gold mine stocks.” And no repudiation followed the unthinkable act of the Philadelphia *Tageblatt*, a German Socialist paper in this city, when it accepted \$200 on its own confession, for having printed in the late summer of 1909 a full page advertisement, photographs, biographies and all, of the McNichol “Gang” candidates running for office that year. The matter came up before Local Philadelphia of the SP while I was still a deluded member of that organization, and Local Philadelphia did not repudiate the *Tageblatt*, any more than it denounced the same paper for printing “Traction Talks” for the Rapid Transit Company during the carmen’s strike of the spring of 1910.

Now some SP men will say, “The *Tageblatt* is not a Socialist paper; we do not pretend to control the *Tageblatt*.” No, of course not, the SP cannot control any of its papers. Yet if the Philadelphia *Tageblatt* is

not a Socialist paper, representing the SP, I would ask why did Local Philadelphia make such a noise (which resulted in nothing) over the matter of publication of the advertisement (paid for) of the “Gang” candidates, and why does the Official Bulletin of the Socialist Party, issued from its National Office, and the convention proceedings of 1910, include this paper in its list of Socialist papers, urging the German readers to subscribe thereto?

There is another important difference between the two parties; that is the matter of State autonomy. In the SP each state is allowed to have its own kind of Socialism. Therefore we see that in California, Socialism means anti-immigration; in Trenton, NJ, it means “Commission Government”; in Los Angeles, it means municipal harbors, etc.

I said at the beginning of this communication that the SP stands for reform. In Trenton, as I told you, they advocated the commission form of government, not because it is Socialism, but because “the people wanted it.” The Socialists are supposed to be working for the interests of the wage-workers. How is a wage-worker to be benefited by commission government? Aside from the fact that in doing away with parties it is a serious blow at democracy, what does it promise? Its promise is graft-free and economical administration of affairs, with the result of reduced taxation. And what has the wage-worker, who must go on the labor market and sell his brain or muscle for a price that is determined by the law of supply and demand, the supply and demand of labor in the market — what interest has he in high taxes or low taxes? He rents houses and pays rent, you say. Well, is the rent of the house you live in determined by the taxes your landlord pays, or is the price of this commodity also determined by the law of supply and demand of houses in the market? Have you ever known of a condition of low rents under high taxation because the demand for houses was less than the supply? Study up this question of taxation and see if it is a Socialist issue.

Again, as to reform in the SP. Here, in the present campaign of Philadelphia, Charles Sehl, the candidate for Mayor on the SP ticket, takes up the false question of taxes. Also, in the issue of September 18, 1911, of

†— It is worthy of mention that the Resolutions Committee of the 1910 “National Congress” of the Socialist Party [Chicago: May 15-21, 1910] did not favorably report *any* resolutions out of committee, with all the “unfavorably reported” resolutions hastily inserted into the record on the last day of the gathering without further discussion, in accord with the previous decision of the

the New York Call, a privately owned SP paper, Sehl has an article called "Are the Working People of Philadelphia to be Fooled Again?" and then he proceeds to fool them completely on the question of municipal ownership, saying, "Put the SP in, and you will have municipal ownership of gas, electricity, streetcars, etc." Then this "intelligent" Socialist makes the silly and rather fatal mistake of pointing out that England is ahead of the US in the matter of municipal ownership. He points out that many cities in England own their gas, water, lighting, and even slaughterhouses. And in what country of capitalist development, I ask you, is labor so poorly paid, and the condition of the workers so bad as England? No. It has succeeded in doing the only thing that municipal ownership can ever do under capitalism; it has cheapened the value of the only thing the workingman and woman has to sell, his and her labor-power.

The Socialist Party says that ultimately it stands for the Socialist Commonwealth, but in the meantime it "plays politics" and makes every effort, like the capitalist reformers, to win the votes of the unthinking people on "Popular Issues."

The Socialist Labor Party, quite differently, states boldly that the only issue for the working class is the abolition of the wage system and to rescue themselves from their commodity status in modern society. And this is to be done only by a revolutionary organization of the workers on the political field, not for reform (let us leave that to the capitalist reformers), but for revolution. Then we must organize in the places where

we work, in the mines, mills, railroads, shops, stores, offices, etc., where we are today in actual physical possession, and where the only thing that stands between us and our freedom is a "kink" in our brain which must be straightened out so that we can see our strength and our right to the great means of production which have been taken from us when we slept.

I have tried to point out to you the main points of difference, mainly the question of industrial unionism plus political action, the question of party-owned press, the question of State autonomy, the question of reform or revolution. I may not have covered it as satisfactorily as I should have; I may not have made it entirely clear, but if you are really sincere in your desire to know, and I am sure you are, you will read and investigate further. You will subscribe to the *Weekly People*, 25 cents for 3 months. If you read the *Weekly People* for 3 weeks, I think at the end of that time you will know a good deal of Socialism, both theoretical and tactical.

If you desire, we will send you literature, and if you are ever in Philadelphia, stop and call at our Headquarters, 1330 Arch Street, open every evening and Saturday and Sunday.

We will keep your card on file and send you further literature and information.

Yours for Revolutionary Socialism,

Mary Rantz, Secretary,
SEC of Pa.

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