
Socialist Agitation Among Farmers in America.

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The United States is today certainly the most important and interesting of all civilized countries. Not England, but America, shows us our future today, so far as any country can show another's future, considering that every country has its own peculiar development. Capitalism makes its greatest progress in America. There it reigns with the most unlimited brutality and carries the class antagonisms to a climax. And at the same time this tendency towards sharper class antagonisms is forced on other countries through the intensification of competition, or rather this tendency, already present in all countries, is accentuated by American competition.

While in the middle of the last [19th] century it was necessary to study England in order to understand the tendencies of modern capitalism, our knowledge on this subject today must be derived from America. At the same time it is even possible to learn more about the essence of the latest phase of capitalism in Germany than in England. In the latter country it is most disguised by traditions, while this is least the case in America. Germany stands also in this respect between the two great representatives of capitalist rule as it does in regard to the rapidity of its development.

The future which America shows us would be very cheerless if it did not reveal at the same time a growth of the Socialist movement. Nowhere are all the



means of political power so shamelessly purchasable as in America: administration, popular representation, courts, police and press; nowhere are they so directly dependent on the great capitalists. And nowhere is it more apparent than there that a proletariat with a Socialist conscience is the only means of saving the nation, which is falling even faster into complete servitude to the great capitalists than they are able to subjugate foreign countries.

So far the success of the American Socialists has not been very encouraging. It seemed almost as if there were something in the character of the Anglo-Saxon race which made them immune against the "poison of socialism." In a certain sense this is actually true. The Anglo-Saxon is of an eminently practical nature. He prefers inductive reasoning in science to the deductive method, and keeps as much as possible out of the way of generalizing statements. In politics he only approaches problems that

promise immediate success, and he prefers to overcome arising difficulties as he meets them instead of penetrating to the bottom of them. It would be an interesting study to find out whether this character is inherited and how much of it is acquired. I am inclined to think that it is largely due to the fact that in England the bourgeoisie became the ruling class earlier than anywhere else, for its manner of reasoning as a class corresponds to the English character. The thoughts and feelings of the bourgeoisie have nowhere become so national in scope as in England since the sixteenth century. That this is a social, not a natural phenomenon is further substantiated by the fact that the whole Anglo-Saxon world combines with this practical sense a religious turn of mind that is not equaled anywhere in the world. In general, it is true that religiousness is greater in Protestant than in Catholic countries. The abolition of celibacy has probably much to do with this. In Catholic countries the clergy does not propagate itself legitimately. New life comes to the Catholic clergy only from the rest of society, today mostly from the economically most backward classes. Hence they cease to play a role in the intellectual life of the nation. But the Protestant clergymen generate a large offspring, which are a considerable factor in bourgeois intelligence. Thanks to this circumstance the protestant clergymen are not only on the whole more intelligent than the Catholic clergy but their sons also take up science and carry into it the religious sentiment of their fathers. In Catholic countries, religion and science are strictly separated, even in the persons of their representatives. The Protestant clergymen arrive at a certain conciliation of religion and science by dint of which they sometimes narrow the one, while giving a longer lease of life to the other.

In England there is, besides, the additional circumstance that religion was still the ruling mode of thought at the time when the bourgeois revolution took place. On the continent, the fight between the revolutionary and reactionary classes took place in the eighteenth and the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century in the form of enlightenment against religion. In England, it was fought in the seventeenth century in the form of the struggle of one religious sect against another.

The emigrants carried the peculiar Anglo-Saxon mode of thought along with them across the ocean.

They did not find anything on the other side that could have shaken them in their views. No class free from the work for a living was formed that could have cultivated arts and sciences for their own sake. We only find farmers and city dwellers whose maxim was that of the home country: Time is Money.

This also became the principle of the gradually arising proletariat for the simple reason that they did not feel as a proletariat, but considered their position only as a stage of transition for the purpose of becoming farmers, capitalists or at least lawyers, which was not unusual for many decenniums. To make money, in order to escape from their class, that was the ruling passion of the proletariat.

But even when a permanent proletariat arose, in which born Americans began to take their places by the side of foreign immigrants and Negroes, the Anglo-Saxons still remained "practical politicians." They did, indeed, begin to understand that they must go into politics for themselves, but like true practical politicians, they demanded that it should be a shortsighted policy which should take heed only of the moment and regard it more practical to run after a bourgeois swindler who promises real successes for tomorrow, instead of standing by a party of their own class which is honest enough to confess that it has nothing but struggles and sacrifices in store for the next future, and which declares it to be foolish to expect to reap immediately after sowing.

If at any time Anglo-American workingmen had come to the conclusion that they must keep clear of the old capitalist parties, then this ill-starred "practical" sense would mislead them into founding a party on some single issue, which was supposed to cure at once all evils, free silver, single tax, or the like. But when this agitation did not bring any immediate success, then the masses soon tired of it, and the movement which had grown up over night collapsed quickly. Only the workingmen of German origin kept a Socialist movement alive among their countrymen. However, such a movement of immigrants could never hope to become a serious political factor. And as this emigration from Germany decreased considerably (the number of emigrants to the United States was 216,089 in 1881, while in 1899 it only reached 19,016), and as the Germans in American soon became anglicized, this German Socialist propaganda not only made no

progress, but actually fell off after a certain time.

Though the German socialist movement in America is thus declining, it nevertheless has not been in vain. For to it is due the existence of a growing Anglo-American movement for Socialism which aims higher, develops the theoretical understanding of the class struggle, and, standing on a solid basis, is rising steadily and irrepressibly.

This progress is not so rapid as the prior Anglo-American movements; for example, the Greenback movement, Kearney's California Workingmen's party, 1878-79; the Henry George episode, 1886-87; Bellamyism and Populism in the beginning of the 1890s. But we may regard this as a good sign, for a mushroom growth was hitherto always followed by a rapid dissolution.

The new Anglo-American Social Democracy is not yet ten years old. It dates from the last crisis. We may regard the great Pullman strike of 1894, which was led so brilliantly by Eugene V. Debs, as the date of its birth. True, that strike ended in defeat, but it was a very honorable defeat after a protracted struggle, in which nothing was left untried to vanquish a superior enemy in a fight that excited and shook the Union to its foundations. Since then Debs and his friends have developed into class-conscious Socialists, mainly under the influence of German Socialist elements, and their influence on the working class is growing from day to day.

Just while I am writing these lines, the American party press reaches me with the news that the conventions of the Western Federation of Labor, the Western Federation of Miners, and the United Association of Hotel and Restaurant Employees, numbering together 150,000 members, have adopted the platform of the Socialist Party in Denver, Colo.

The rise of the Socialist literature is no less cheering than that of the Socialist organizations. Numerous weeklies in the English language are at the disposal of the party, and a daily is planned in New York. Our American comrades also have an illustrated family paper, *The Comrade*, and a scientific review, *The International Socialist Review*, appearing monthly at 56 Fifth Avenue, Chicago, Ill., which contains articles of great merit.

The new Anglo-American movement also begins to develop its own scientific literature, which stands above the Utopian stage of Bellamy and Laurence Gronlund and accepts the fact of the class struggle.

A welcome beginning of such literature is the book on *The American Farmer* by A.M. Simons, the editor of the above named International Socialist Review.† It is characteristic that the recent Anglo-American Socialism first endeavors to stand on its own feet in the agrarian question.

The industrial conditions may be understood in a general way by the help of the German Marxist literature. For this purpose, translations are sufficient. But the agrarian conditions of America are very peculiar. Not the least peculiarity is the fact that the United States, in spite of their highly developed industrial capitalism, are a strongly agrarian country, which exports a surplus of farm products and in which the majority of the population are farmers. Every Anglo-American labor movement which pretended to be an independent movement therefore sought from the beginning the support of the farmers and found it. This was the case with the Greenbackers in the 1870s, with the followers of Henry George in the 1880s, the Populists in the 1890s. The attitude of the Socialist Party toward the farmers is, therefore, one of the most important problems which occupy the young Socialist branch of the Anglo-American labor movement.

The work of Simons is especially well done on the descriptive side. Briefly and yet graphically he draws the picture of agriculture in the different parts of the Union, the variations of which are much greater than, for example, in the different parts of Germany, for the climatic and historical differences are far greater. The German Empire extends over nine degrees of latitude, from the 47th to the 56th degree, while the American Union covers 25 degrees, from the 24th to the 49th degree of latitude. In the German Empire the German farm element rules, grown out of the mark commune. In the United States we find the remains of the Spanish latifundian system grafted upon Indian barbarism, the plantation system built on the slavery of Negroes, furthermore the transitory phenomenon of the bonanza farms, of the wheat factories, based on

†- A.M. Simons, *The American Farmer*. (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1902).

superficial cultivation and exploitation of labor. Finally, we find the cultivation of arid lands by the help of irrigation as the last and most promising phase of agriculture. Every one of these systems of cultivation develops its own peculiar social forms and problems.

Simons adds to this description a series of searching analyses of the influence of industrial development on agriculture. He shows that agriculture is not stationary, that the law of increasing control by great capitalist interests is also felt in this field, only in another form than in industries. The development in agriculture takes place in such a way that the various functions of agriculture are transferred one by one to great capitalist concerns by the help of modern technical improvements. In this way these functions cease to be agricultural and become industrial.

The rest of agriculture which has not yet become industrialized exhibits few signs of vitality and becomes ever more dependent on the transportation companies and the great capitalist industries which alone render its products available for the consumer.

Analogous to my own view, then, Simons sees in the progressive industrialization of agriculture its peculiar advance on the way of progress.

And although he recognizes that the small farmer is by no means threatened with rapid extinction, yet he does not sing the praise of the little farm, being conscious of its waste of energy and technical backwardness.

America is the land of agricultural machinery, but nevertheless Simons emphasizes that the value of farm machinery does not grow. He quotes an article from the Yearbook of the Agricultural Department, according to which the average value of farm implements and machinery amounted to \$111 in 1870, \$101 in 1880, and \$108 in 1890. He sees the cause of this stagnation in the poverty of farmers and in the impossibility of employing machinery to good effect on their small farms. On the other hand, he shows that the great number of the latest machines, especially those driven by steam, become too big to be owned and used by the single farmer. In consequence these machines become the property of capitalists who rent them to farmers, as is done in Germany; for example, with the threshing machine.

At the same time, mortgages and tenantry are progressing. In the dry belt the farmers are becoming

more and more dependent on the great companies that own the irrigation systems.

These are the means by which the property of the farmers in the tools of agricultural production are being more and more restricted and concentrated in the hands of capitalist exploiters. The small farmers are not displaced by mammoth farms, but they become more and more dependent on great capitalist concerns. The social condition of the farmer approaches ever more that of the sweating boss in industry. He is not yet a wage worker, but he ceases to be an independent producer.

His relation to the proletariat and the Socialist Party corresponds to this intermediate position. It is not clear or easily interpreted, and largely dependent on local and temporal peculiarities. Nevertheless, Simons emphasizes energetically the necessity and possibility of winning the farmer for the Socialist Party.

This question is one of the most difficult and disputed in our party. I would not assent without reservation to those parts of Simons' book which are devoted to this subject.

Simons points out, for example, that the industrial laborers make up only 25 percent of the voters, while the farmers make up 40 percent, so that none of the two parties could conquer the political power by itself. This sort of argument would hold good only then when it were a question of gaining political ascendancy tomorrow. But Comrade Simons will hardly think of doing that. At present it is not a question of winning the political power, but taking root in the popular mind. For this purpose the industrial proletariat is certainly better fitted than the farming population. To agitate among farmers when the mass of the city workers are still strangers to Socialism is equivalent to bringing rocky soil under cultivation at great expense and leaving fertile soil untouched from lack of labor power.

How the proportion of the two camps will be when the American Socialist Party will be strong enough to risk the fight for political power, we do not know. In Simons' book we find remarkable figures to show how rapidly the city population in the United States is increasing relatively and absolutely. He gives the following tables:

<i>year</i>	<i>city population</i>	<i>rural population</i>	<i>city people per 10,000</i>
1820	475,135	9,158,687	493
1850	2,897,586	20,294,290	1,249
1870	8,071,875	30,486,496	2,093
1890	18,284,385	44,337,865	2,920

However, the proportion between industrial and rural population changes very much in favor of the former, if we observe the various States by themselves. I use for this purpose the statistics of trades of 1890, which I happen to have on hand. According to these statistics, 44.8% of the male population above 10 years of age was employed in agriculture (including fisheries and mining), while industries employed 21.59%, transportation 16.46%, personal service 14.31%, free arts 21.67%. But in the Northeastern States agriculture employed only 22.46%, while industries employed 35.31% and transportation 21.67%. These two categories, then, are already in the majority in the Northeast. In the Southern states the proportion is reversed. Agriculture is supreme down there. It comprises in the Atlantic states 60.32% of the male producers, while industries employ only 13.35% and transportation 11.98%. The Central states show a still greater disproportion, with 68.05% in agriculture, 9.08% in industries, and 10.24% in transportation. The largest agrarian population is in the state of Mississippi, where agriculture employs 80.11%, industries only an insignificant 4.83%. But these are just the States in which mortgage slavery and tenantry, which require the addition of wages, are most widespread. Of the 1,836,372 farms in these States, 706,343, or 38%, were rented in 1890, while only 18% were rented in the Northeastern states, and 29% in the total Union. In this respect, and in the general lack of cultivation, the Southern states compare with the south of Italy. While the number of illiterates above 10 years of age in the Northeastern States was 6.21% in 1890, it was 40.29% in the Southern Atlantic states and 39.54% in the Central states of the South. In these states the Negroes outnumber the rest of the producers, especially in agriculture. In 1890 there were 3,409,860 colored people to a white farming population of 2,355,570.

I am convinced that Comrade Simons will not anticipate any considerable success from our agitation among the farming population of the South. They are

the people from which we have least of all to expect, as regards understanding and regular participation in the class struggle of the industrial proletariat. They may be ripe for a revolt of desperation, and when the proletariat will seize the political power in the industrial districts, the oppressed farmers in the South will not oppose them and will help in their own way. But it seems to me impossible to found a permanent party organization with them.

Hence only the farmers of the Middle West and the Northwest remain. Their number is not insignificant, for they comprise nearly half of all the farms (in 1890, 2,069,700 out of a total of 4,564,641). Their rural population is still very strong, relatively speaking. The percentage of producers above 10 years of age was 47.42% in the states of the Middle West, and 36.28% in the Northwestern states. At the same time, the industrial population, which is not inconsiderable (19.28 and 28.82%), offers favorable opportunities for Socialist propaganda. Strong and independent they are, and not only free from the barbarism, but also from the corruption of the East. In Europe, during the 1870s and 1880s, it was not the economically highly developed England, but the more backward Germany which offered the best opportunities for the development of an independent labor party. Similarly, it may be left for the states of the West and Middle West to out march the more highly developed Eastern states in this respect. For those States, then, it becomes imperative to define our position toward the farmers; that is, toward those owners of middle-sized and large farms who are living on the proceeds of their lands. In the following remarks I am referring only to this class of farmers, not to the very small farmers and farmhands, nor to the great landowners who manage their farms on a purely capitalist scale. Our position toward these is perfectly clear, only that toward the farmer proper requires definition.

The success of our propaganda among them will depend above all on the end for which we are striving. If we should aim to draw them into our movement in masses, I am afraid we should not accomplish much good.

Comrade Simons shows convincingly how much the farmer has to gain by voting for Socialism. His remarks on the prospects of American agriculture are very fascinating and make one of the most interesting

passages of his book. They have a refreshing effect after the narrowness of view to which some people are trying to accustom us at present. But we have not yet reached the stage where we can bring Socialism into practical application, and especially the practical farmer will not show any enthusiasm for the society of the future, until it will have become the society of the present. It is the class struggle of the present which forms parties and keeps them together. But in this struggle the farmers have different interests than the industrial laborers.

A comrade who thought he knew how to handle the farmers once ridiculed our city agitators who were foolish enough, to speak to the farmers of the eight-hour day and similar matters. That, he said, was the way to deter them. That was correct, yet that comrade was not making a point against the "foolish" agitators, but against his pet idea of winning the farmers for our party. True, the farmer has no sympathy for the eight-hour day and labor protection. He does not only assume an attitude of indifference, but of hostility toward them. He is obliged to work from early dawn to the dark of night, sometimes sixteen to eighteen hours, and the city workers would only render eight hours of much lighter labor. And how is he going to hold on to his men, if wages rise in the city and the hours of labor are shortened?

This contrast is also felt in America. An article in the May number of *The International Socialist Review*, "A Farmers' Criticism of the Socialist Party," is very significant. The writer, J.B. Webster, has formerly played a role in the Populist Party. This party has had a short run, and the old parties, says Webster, satisfy the working class in the city and country less and less. They are looking for a new party. In view of this condition of the minds, the Socialist Party might well count on having success among the farmers, but it would have to give up its character as a mere workingmen's party. The interests of the farmers are said not to be those of the wage workers. Shortening of the hours of labor and increasing the wages may be very well for the wage worker, but for the farmer this would mean an increase of cost of production. Whoever wishes to win the farmer must, therefore, not speak of shortening working hours and increasing wages. But everybody can imagine how trusty those party members will be who can only be won by concealing the

main essence of our present day's work from them.

There are, furthermore, antagonisms between the proletarians and the owners of middle-sized and large farms not alone in workingmen's politics, but also in general politics, that make a permanent amalgamation of them in the same party impossible. True, both are antagonists of capital. But there are many ways of fighting it. It may be forced beyond itself or the attempt may be made to drive it back. The first is the proletarian method, the second that of the bourgeois farmer.

However much the proletariat may be oppressed by the great capitalist mode of production, still his condition improves with the growth and technical improvement of the industrial plants. For small and technically backward concerns can carry on the competitive struggle only at the expense of their employees. The great capitalist mode of production, which forms the basis for the emancipation of the working class, is even at present the most favorable for the workers, wherever it is in competition with small concerns. The little bourgeois Socialism which does not comprehend this simply attributes the Socialist preference for production on a large scale to dogmatic fanaticism which feels obliged to repeat blindly the Marxist formulas. But strange to say, we find the same preference among the English trade unions to which even the most obstinate revisionists will hardly attribute any Marxist dogmatism. (See Webb, *Theory and Practice of English Trade Unions*, v. 2, page 86 and following.)

The position of the workers in the present reacts on their attitude toward the development of the future. They expect their emancipation only from the progress over and beyond the present. They are progressive even there where they do not show any class consciousness and do not give any thought to Socialism, as for example, in England. They may be politically ignorant or indifferent, and may permit themselves to be used for reactionary purposes, but they will never consciously strive for any reactionary measure.

Not so the farmers. The whole development tends to undermine their existence. It is not extinguished, but becomes ever more dependent on capital. They have nothing to expect from economic development, but much to fear, and, therefore, they are facing it suspiciously or even with hostility and they are easily won by reactionary aims. This is true, not

for Europe alone. The American farmer of the North is more intelligent and less burdened with traditions than the European farmer. But the American farmers' organizations, the Grangers and the Farmers' Alliance, show a fatal likeness to the German Bund der Landwirthe. Both of those American organizations failed after a mighty prosperity. The causes of their failure are correctly summed up by Simons in the sentence that "nearly everything these parties sought to accomplish was in opposition to the direction of social advance."[†] But this was not only due to their ignorance, but especially to the direction of the class interests which they served.

A new attempt to unite large farmers and proletarians in the same party would end the same way as the Greenback and the Populist movement, or, what is more likely, will fail in the outset.

This is not saying that we should not take notice of the farmers. The Socialist Party must not only win new party members, but its activity must touch all social phases, and it must define its position toward every class in society. The agrarian questions are too important to be passed in silence for, in spite of all technical revolutions, agriculture remains the basis of our existence. And the farmers are too powerful a class to be indifferent to their antagonism. But though different interests may divide the proletariat and the farmers, which make it impossible to unite them in the same party forever, still they have many points of agreement as against other classes that make a temporary alliance not only possible, but also desirable. And a great many antagonisms are really founded on prejudice and may be overcome by enlightenment. Not party membership, but a better understanding of our aims and a temporary alliance, that may be gained by our agitation among farmers. Indeed, situations may arise, in which it will be very valuable to have them as our allies. Agitation among farmers in this sense, wherever conditions seem favorable, is not only worth considering but very desirable, providing it is not carried on at the expense of the industrial and rural wage workers.

Conditions in America are much more favorable for such an agitation among farmers than in Germany. In industrial Europe we have the great antago-

nism between the consumers of foodstuffs or raw material and the farmers as the producers. It does not matter whether they sell grain, wine, butter, hops, or cattle. They are all interested in high prices, while the proletarians want low prices. This antagonism is sharply marked in Europe.

In America, however, it is less clearly apparent. The American farmer is largely dependent on export for the sale of his products. The prices which he receives are not fixed in the local, but in the world market. On the other hand, farmers and wage workers have today the same interest in free trade. The protective tariff on industrial products increases the cost of production for the farmer, and the industrial laborer has nothing to gain from a protective tariff. Industry does not need any more protection. Only the most dangerous antagonists of the proletariat, the cartels and trusts, are favored by it. In Europe, the tariff policy of farmers and wage workers is antagonistic. But in America farmers and farseeing Socialist wage workers follow the same tariff policy.

Besides being less antagonistic to one another as consumers and producers than their European colleagues, the American farmers and wage workers have a common enemy who is missing in Germany: the railroads. In Germany the railroads are overwhelmingly state property, but in America the privately owned railroads are the most powerful means for the exploitation of the farmers by the capitalists. And the owners of the railroads are the same men who are standing opposed to the railroad employees and the iron workers, the two most important branches of labor. The nationalization of the railroads is, therefore, a measure which is for the interest of both classes. The realization of this demand could, however, become very dangerous, if it were not at the same time accompanied by a thorough reform of state and federal administrations. As long as the present corruption continues in these bodies, as long as all public offices are regarded as spoils of the victorious party for rewarding its followers, every increase of the public funds and of public offices means an increase of the corruption fund with which the victorious party pays its voters. But the interests of farmers and wage earners are also identical in the question of administrative reforms.

[†]- Simons, *The American Farmer*, pg. 143.

Finally the antagonism between the two classes is less pronounced in America because wage labor plays a less important role in agriculture. In 1895 the number of independent producers in German agriculture was 2,202,227, of wage workers 5,528,708. In America the proportion was almost reversed. While the number of farmers and independent land owners was 5,281,557, there were only 3,004,061 agricultural laborers. There were, furthermore, 1,913,373 day laborers, some of whom would have to be recounted as agricultural laborers. At any rate, the number of independent farmers outweighs that of the farm hands, especially in the West. In the northern part of the Middle West, for example, we find only 778,026 farm hands to 2,284,625 farmers. While the farmers of the Union constitute 64% of the total of farmers and farm hands, the proportion rises to 76% in the North of the Central States. Even if we were to include all the day laborers in the farm hands, which would be exaggerating, the number of farmers in the Central North would amount to 61%, in the Union to 53%, while it reaches only 32% in Germany.

In view of these facts we may well assume that conditions are more favorable for a temporary alliance of farmers and wage laborers in large parts of America than in most parts of Germany. An agitation which merely aims to win the good will of the farmers and to induce them to regard us as the lesser evil as compared with the capitalist parties, may count on good results. But I should certainly regard it as a dangerous mistake to repeat the short-lived experiments of the Greenbackers, Single-Taxers, and Populists, to weld farmers

and wage workers into one party, and to modify our program and tactics accordingly. However useful the first method may be, the second is certainly injurious.

Simons does not state clearly whether he recommends the first or the second method of agitation among farmers. Still we need not fear that we shall see a new edition of the second kind. J.B. Webster has already pointed out in his article that the intimate connection of the Socialist Party with the trade union movement is one of the essential obstacles to an adherence of the farmers to our party. And this obstacle will hardly decrease in proportion, but rather continue to grow with the spread of the Socialist idea among the American trade unions. Not only trade unionism pure and simple has its dangers, but also party politics pure and simple. The trade unions may be guarded against dangers by the party and vice versa. The growing Socialist sentiment among the trade unions is the best guarantee that the Socialist Party and the trade unions will both keep on the right way.

Simons' book, therefore, does not indicate the beginning of a farmers' invasion into the Socialist Party, but only the first step in the endeavor to bring the two classes to a better mutual understanding, seeing that they are bound to assist each other and still know very little about one another. This the book accomplishes in a very satisfactory manner. It will induce many a farmer to at least view the Socialist Party without prejudice, if it does not make him a Socialist. Above all, it will have the effect to enlighten the party members on the character and tendencies of American agriculture and on the agrarian tasks of the Socialist Party.

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