
Socialism and the Municipalities

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I attach more importance to the Socialist municipal campaigns than do many other Socialists. I do so because I believe that much more can be achieved for Socialism with a proletariat enlightened, well-housed, well-fed, and well-clad, than with the proletariat ignorant, degraded, and abiding in economic misery. And it is through the municipality more than through any other agency that the living conditions of the proletariat can and will be improved.

The economic elevation of the working class means more power. But there are other reasons equally weighty that will make the municipality an important factor in the social revolution.

At the great revolutions of the past centered in and around the cities. I have not in mind ancient history when city and state were synonymous concepts. Nor the medieval time when the rise of the cities led to the overthrow of feudalism. I refer to modern history. The French revolution was a series of municipal uprisings. The same may be said of the revolutions of 1848 and the recent Russian and Chinese revolutions. Certainly, it was a struggle of classes, but territorially and politically, the revolt found in the municipality the most fertile ground.

I see no reason to believe that it will be different in the future. On the contrary, the

political emancipation of the municipality is approaching fast. Particularly in this country. What between concentration of political power in the Federal government on one hand and the development of municipal self-government on the other, the state as a political entity is bound to shrink and shrivel. Be that as it may, there can be no doubt that the political self-determination of the municipalities is at hand.

Economically, the municipality seems to lead an existence which is almost parasitic. Yet appearances are misleading. The municipality pays in kind, that is in labor, for all the labor which it consumes. It does depend upon the country for its raw material. The country could starve a city in short time. It would not be so, if the city were in control of the supply of the raw material. To achieve this end, the cities are now reaching out to control the supply of food stuffs and other raw material. These attempts are now in their infancy and weak. But they are bound to grow until the municipalities will be freed economically as well. To elaborate on this phase of the problem would involve us in a theoretical discussion.

To those who still have faith in the social revolution as a coming event and as a present factor in the uplifting of the working class, it must be obvious that the success of the revolution will depend much more on the number of the municipalities controlled by the social

revolution and the degree of the control than on the number of revolutionary representatives in Congress.

There is another reason, not of as far-reaching but of more immediate moment, why I view the municipal campaigns with deep interest.

Long before the Socialists will have in Congress a representation of any controlling effect, they will be in control of hundreds, aye, thousands of municipalities, wherein they will have an opportunity to demonstrate their revolutionary reconstructive energies and abilities. Without any choice in the matter on their part, the Socialists will be put in a position where they will be compelled to repel the attacks of the capitalist state on Socialist municipalities. This will make the entire policy of Socialist propaganda pro-municipal. And to carry on such a propaganda effectively, the Socialists will

have to develop a municipal program of which the present Socialist program is a very weak beginning.

If there is anything worthy of note in our present municipal program and activity, it is the lack of ideas, initiative, and audacity. So far the Socialist municipal activities have been a very weak imitation of the reformists. After we capture Milwaukee, we set out to "Milwaukeeize" the rest of the country. We raise a dust and hue and cry that blinded and deafened no one but ourselves. After we recovered our sight and hearing, we saw and heard that we failed to "Milwaukeeize" even Milwaukee. No one in particular is to be blamed for that. But we must discourage the huzzah and dust-raising campaigns. The work is much more solid and hard.

Let us set to work with an earnest will.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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