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# A Criticism and a Confession

Unsigned article in *Appeal to Reason* [Girard, KS], no. 1,105 (Feb. 3, 1917), pg. 1.  
Editor of the *Appeal* was Louis Kopelin.

## The National Socialist Vote

1900 .....	96,116	1908 .....	420,973
1904 .....	402,321	1912 .....	901,062
1916 (Estimated by National Secretary Socialist Party)	597,000		

For the first time in the history of the Socialist movement in this country our national vote has shown a loss. To be frank, the loss is even greater than it appears in the above table, for there were about 3,000,000 more votes cast in 1916 than in 1912. Moreover, it is not only the loss in the national vote that we have to sorrowfully record. Our party organization has about half as many dues-paying members at this time as we had a few years ago. And our party press has suffered a severe slump in circulation and effectiveness.

We believe it our duty to make these facts known to our thousands of loyal supporters and hundreds of thousands of faithful readers. Nothing is gained by hiding the truth. If we are to grown in the future we must honestly examine that facts as they are and act accordingly.

For 22 years the *Appeal to Reason* has been the champion of the rights of the disinherited, fighting their battles as best it could under capitalism and ever educating them to the necessity of inaugurating a social system more just and efficient than the present one. To find that after 22 years of untiring efforts on the part of the *Appeal* and 17 years of organized activity on the part of the Socialist Party that our numbers have diminished and our common influence has lessened is to find SOMETHING RADICALLY

WRONG. The *Appeal* frankly acknowledges this patent and obvious fact — and intends to profit from this sad experience.

A score or more of explanations have been offered by prominent Socialists in the vain endeavor to cover up the fact that we have suffered a serious setback. These explanations do not explain, mainly because they are attempts to throw the blame on opposing factions. Some of our comrades blame the extreme revolutionists for our loss on the ground that their views on direct action and tactics of that sort have alienated from the Socialist Party persons of orderly leanings. Other comrades blame our opportunists on the ground that their alleged “vote catching” methods have disgusted the “revolutionary proletariat.” Still others blame our present situation on the world war, which is a very easy and popular thing to do.

In our humble opinion, our troubles are due to something more fundamental and deep-rooted than the reasons generally given. It is not the *Appeal's* object to get into a wordy discussion of how and why these things have happened. Our object in reviewing our loss is to lay the basis for what should be done in the future.

The *Appeal* firmly believes that our entire scheme of propaganda generally adopted by Socialists during the last 20 years has been built on preconceived notions not applicable to conditions in the United States. When we reflect upon the cumbersomeness and fruitlessness of our methods we are amazed that we have made such progress as we have. It is remarkable that American Socialism has grown in spite of the Socialists.

## ***We Criticize Others.***

We criticize others that an artificial and arbitrary plan for propagating Socialism and organizing politically was foisted upon the American movement, fitting us like a straitjacket.

We criticize others that a method of organization with rigid rules of discipline befitting the foreign military nations which gave them birth was for years considered a model for a people like ours whose ideals, traditions, and training are liberal, democratic, and unrestrained.

We criticize others that from the same source a literature and an involved philosophy replete with stereotyped phrases have been imported and rammed down the unwilling throats of a people like ours whose language and logic are simple and direct.

We criticize others that no effort was made to recognize and encourage the original ideas of education, agitation, and organization that have been conceived and developed by American Socialists for the practical purpose of obtaining results among a people they understand much better than do the Socialist *<illeg.>* of Berlin, Paris, and London.

We criticize others for permitting the movement to suffer the un-American and undemocratic rule of centralized power in the hands of officials and committees, allowing no development and freedom of action on the part of the rank and file.

We criticize others for the senseless and criminal political inactivity of the Socialist movement between national elections, which has done more to deaden and petrify our forces than any blow that could possibly be inflicted by the enemy. All of our political action so far has consisted of nominating tickets and attempting to elect Socialists to any office from dogcatcher to President. To obtain results through any activity other than the prescribed and orthodox political methods has been considered something akin to heresy. The fact that this country permits political action

through popular agitation and non-partisan channels has been overlooked by our leaders because nothing about these tactics has been written in foreign Socialist textbooks that we must all parrot and revere.

## ***We Confess Ourselves.***

We confess ourselves for having aided and abetted, consciously and unconsciously, the infliction of most of these undemocratic and ineffective methods and ideas upon the readers and supporters of the *Appeal*. For the sake of unity and harmony we have been guilty of lending our influence to the acceptance of these orthodox and impracticable methods—

### **But we shall do so no more!**

Let it not be misunderstood. The *Appeal* does not intend to desert or oppose the Socialist Party. As in the past the same cordial relations will continue. *Appeal* readers have always been and always will be the most promising and profitable material for recruits for the organized Socialist movement. However, hereafter we shall not follow precedents and “philosophies” for ideas and methods best likely to attract the millions of American workers whose conversion and support we must obtain in order to overthrow the present brutal system of industry. The *Appeal* believes that the salvation of the working class lies in constant and unabating political action. It does not believe that such political action need necessarily be confined to the kind we have been accustomed. Whatever may be their value in ameliorating the present conditions of the working class — labor unions, colonies, and cooperatives will not accomplish the social revolution. The *Appeal* has a plan of action that is in complete harmony with the philosophy of Socialism, in its finest and truest meaning.

There is no way of knowing how much farther along the road to Socialism we might be at this time if 10 years ago we had taken the liberty of action that we now propose to take! Fortunately,

it is not too late!

They say that criticism clarifies the atmosphere and that an honest confession is good for the soul. We trust that this statement will have both of these desirable effects.

We need at this time brave men and women whose devotion to the Socialist ideal will overcome all vague theories and dogmas. We are not Socialists because we have rituals. We are not Socialists because we use a set of phrases. We are Socialists because we have a vision of the Better Day and want it to supplant the nightmare of poverty, misery, and injustice. The *Appeal* knows the rank and file of American Socialists better than do most of the so-called spokesmen of our movement. We know that this rank and file is imbued with the noblest ideas. We know that they are a band of unselfish and devoted men and women whose only aim in life is to bring about happiness and justice for all mankind. These men and women are the very personification of the social revolution. Little things such as phrases and rituals do not interest them. What they are after is

the goal. Any honorable means that will accomplish the much desired results will receive their unqualified support. They want a little bit of heaven in their own lives and they will rally to any plan of action that promises success.

We are in the position of a mighty army that has just met with a serious defeat. We are now holding a council of war. We are studying our experiences in the lost battle for the lessons they shall teach us. Yet we are devoting most of our energies to the formulation and execution of a plan of action that will strike our opponents at their weakest spot and make the first break in the enemy's ranks.

**This plan of action in which we have an abiding faith and in which we have staked our all, is the result of days and nights of solemn deliberation. The practical details have been worked out most carefully and thoroughly. In next week's *Appeal* we shall submit this plan of action for your thoughtful consideration.**

***Edited by Tim Davenport.***

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