
A Statement to Our Readers.

by J. Louis Engdahl

Unsigned statement, attributed to Editor J. Louis Engdahl, published in *The American Socialist* [Chicago], v. 3, no. 52, whole no. 244 (July 7, 1917), pg. 1.

The edition of June 30th [1917] of *The American Socialist*, our Liberty Edition, has been held up by the Solicitor General of the postal department at Washington as whether it is mailable.

For this reason, many subscribers have not received their paper. We are still hoping to have this issue declared mailable and hope to have this and future issues, in regular form, go out as usual.

Our paper will be published regularly. Every effort will be made to comply with the law and at the same time issue a publication that will be a credit to the Socialist movement. There should be no letup in getting subscriptions. We must continue to rely entirely on your efforts in increasing our army of readers, now as always.

Our Liberty Edition, so far as we have been able to learn, is being held up by the postal department on the following grounds:

FIRST: The issue of June 16th [1917] was declared to be unmailable under the act of June 15, 1917. This decision was not reached until June 30th, two weeks after the offending issue had gone through the mails. There is a ruling of the postal department, however, that when any issue of any publication is held to be unmailable, all subsequent issues are under suspicion, and must be held up until a decision is reached by the Washington authorities. This may not be for several days or weeks. From the ruling of the Solicitor General of the post office department there is no appeal except to Congress.

SECOND: One objection to the issue of June 16th, according to such information as we have been able to get, was that it carried an advertisement of the leaflet, "The Price We Pay" [by Irwin St. John Tucker]. This leaflet, unknown to us, had been declared to be

unmailable under the act of June 15, 1917, known as the Espionage Law. This decision was received by the Chicago post office June 22, but was not communicated to us. We knew nothing whatever about this post office decision, but proceeding on the strength of several opinions from federal district attorneys in various parts of the country, had assumed that they were correct in holding that the leaflet was unobjectionable. Not having been notified that there was anything wrong with the leaflet in the eyes of the government, we have continued to advertise and circulate it. In view of the post office ruling, now that it has been made known to us, "The Price We Pay" will not hereafter be advertised in *The American Socialist*, and no mention will be made of it.

THIRD: We have also been informed that the whole "spirit" and "tone" of the issue of June 16th is contrary to the "spirit" of the act of June 15th. This act, insofar as it applies to the mails, is herewith reproduced:

Sec. 2. Amendments to Postal Laws and Regulations.

Washington, June 16, 1917.

Order no. 431.

The Postal Laws and Regulations of 1913 is hereby amended by the addition of the following as Section 481-1/2.

1. Every letter, writing, circular, postal card, picture, print, engraving, photograph, newspaper, pamphlet, book, or other publication, matter, or thing, of any kind, in violation of any of the provisions of this act (Act of June 15, 1917, Espionage Bill), is hereby declared to be nonmailable matter and shall not be conveyed in the mails or delivered from any post office or by any letter carrier: Provided, That nothing in this act shall be so construed as to authorize any person other than an employee of the Dead Letter Office, duly authorized thereto, or other person upon a search warrant authorized by law, to open any letter not addressed to himself. (Act of

June 15, 1917, Sec. 1, Title XII).

2. Every letter, writing, circular, postal card, picture, print, engraving, photograph, newspaper, pamphlet, book, or other publication, matter, or thing, of any kind, containing any matter advocating or urging treason, insurrection, or forcible resistance to any law of the United States, is hereby declared to be nonmailable. (Act of June 15, 1917, Sec. 2, Title XII).

3. Paragraph 1 above relates to mail matter of any class which is in violation of any of the provisions of the Act of June 15, 1917, known as the Espionage Bill, and applies specifically to all matter which is intended to interfere with the operation of success of the military or naval forces of the United States or to promote the success of its enemies, or which is intended to cause insubordination, disloyalty, mutiny, or refusal of duty, in the military or naval forces of the United States, or which is intended to obstruct the recruiting or enlistment service of the United States. (Act of June 15, 1917, Sec. 3, Title I).

4. Whoever shall use or attempt to use the mails or Postal Service of the United States for the transmission of any matter declared by this title (Title XII, Act of June 15, 1917, Espionage Bill) to be nonmailable, shall be fined not more than \$5,000 or imprisoned not more than five years, or both. Any person violating any provision of this title may be tried and punished either in the district in which the unlawful matter or publication was mailed, or to which it was carried by mail for delivery according to the direction thereon, or in which it was cause to be delivered by mail to the person to whom it was addressed. (Act of June 15, 1917, Sec. 3, Title XII).

This issue of *The American Socialist* is reduced in size, owing to these conditions.† As we go to press, information is received from our representative in Washington as follows:

“Solicitor Lamar, post office department, today told [SPA] National Committeeman Julian Pierce he was working in unison with Department of Justice and General Crowder to enforce law as to mailing seditious matter, and that Socialist editors wishing to avoid confiscation of editions should get and read copy of law to learn what is forbidden. At Department of Justice, two assistant attorney generals in charge this matter finally agreed to receive from Pierce in his official capacity as National Committeeman his request that department issue full statement as to what in confiscated editions Socialist and other papers was ruled unmailable, giving samples such matter, expected that such statement is made within 48 hours by Department of Justice.”

†- Ordinarily a 4 page newspaper, the July 7, 1917 issue of *The American Socialist* was published as a single two-sided sheet, of which “A Statement to Our Readers” was the entire content of the front side. The paper, the official organ of the Socialist Party of America, continued to straggle along for 9 more issues, with its final issue dated Sept. 8, 1917 (whole no. 253). A new application for 2nd Class mailing status was filed in the middle of August 1917, but no reply was forthcoming prior to a September 5 a raid on Socialist Party headquarters in Chicago, which also housed *The American Socialist*. A file of back issues in addition to leaflets, pamphlets, books, and letters were seized. That same day the decision was made to terminate *The American Socialist* and to make provision for the privately-owned Chicago Socialist paper *The Eye-Opener* to be sent to party members instead. The format of *The Eye-Opener* was changed at once from tabloid to *American Socialist*-like broadsheet and the whole numbers of the former official organ began being used in the new de facto official organ effective with the Sept. 22, 1917 issue (whole no. 255). *The Eye-Opener* continued its run at least through its May 15, 1920 issue (whole no. 328). On July 15, 1920, with the Young Peoples Socialist League now outside of the Socialist Party after having declared itself an independent organization, the party’s *Young Socialists’ Magazine* was renamed *The Socialist World* and made the new monthly official organ of the SPA.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2006. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.