

The 1905 Mayoral Election in New York City (January 6, 1906)

The recent campaign in New York, upon which you desire an expression of views, was in some respects the most unique municipal contest in the annals of American politics. The main issues, while purely local, sprang from conditions which at bottom are national and international, and the complications which ensued and multiplied with the progress of the campaign, involving the disregard of party lines and the disruption of old affiliations, indicated widespread dissatisfaction and the breaking up of party subserviency, the unfailing precursors and symptoms of organic change.

The municipal administration of New York had been honeycombed with jobbery and corruption. Great corporations secured franchises worth millions for the asking. So openly and brazenly was the continuous performance of "Graft and Boodle" carried on, that the people looked on with speechless amazement, if not admiration.

Railroads, subways, public works, franchises, building contracts — in short everything in New York, including labor unions — have been permeated with the spirit of graft, the vital principle of capitalism, called business, and not only in New York, but the whole country is rampant with the madness it has engendered, and which now rages with all the fury of an epidemic.

With the coming of the election in Greater New York, the spell of the people was broken, and there was a stampede, as there usually is, for what is vaguely called "reform." The situation would have been interesting and complicated enough if the field had been left to the old parties, but with William Randolph Hearst tossed to the surface by the roaring billows of "reform," the roof of the old wigwam fell in, the wild animals roared and snorted in fury, and the free for all circus was open and in full blast.

In such a violent upheaval it is not strange that every pinfeather that was not copper riveted was torn from the Socialist goose. Add to this the fact that the plutocracy vomited a deluge of corruptions funds, and it can be readily understood why the Socialist vote was reduced to its stark-naked minimum.

The introduction, not of Hearst, but of Hearstism, into the campaign is an interesting and immensely suggestive phenomenon from the socialist point of view. In the New York local campaign, Hearst was the political crater through which the volcano of ignorant discontent discharged its fury.¹ Mr. Hearst was not elected, nor desired to be, and more's the pity he was not, that his reform administration might have proved, as it must inevitably have done, an impotent failure and crushing disappointment.

There will be little "reform" in New York or elsewhere this side of the social revolution, but only the failure of reform remedies, after actual trial, will convince the benighted and unthinking millions of that fact.

The flat failure of the reform administration of Judge Dunne² — political classmate of Hearst — in Chicago, has been an eye-opener to many and there have been corresponding accretions to the socialist movement; and even better than this, no reform wave will ever reach high enough to sweep them back whence they came, and the Socialist Party of Chicago is now fortified and secure, and the winds of reform, howl as they may, will never break it from its moorings, nor blow the shingles from its revolutionary roof.

The defeat of Hearst — or, rather, his failure to be counted in (and this incident is another point of special value to socialists), was as fortunate for him as it was unfortunate for socialists; for, had he succeeded, his administration in New York would have been as barren as that of Dunne in Chicago, and there would have been a fresh crop of socialists spawned in Gotham.

However, the "reformers" must have their inning and the sooner the better. Disgusted reformers are very often embryonic revolutionists.

Since the elections in New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, "reform" has been on the rising tide and anti-graft has been the battle cry of the populace. Little do these millions who are shrieking against graft and for reform realize that the stenches that offend their nostrils and sicken their stomachs rise from the rottenness of the capitalist system; and while trying to expel the stenches, they protest vehemently against the removal of the system.

Socialists are digging the grave in which to bury from sight and smell the putrescent anatomy of this pestilential system.

But for the present, the "reformers" of capitalism, the one-step-at-a-timers have the floor, and socialists must patiently bide their time,

meanwhile keeping up the work of agitation, education, and organization with unrelaxing energy and determination.

The people are breaking camp and are on the move, and although having no definite line of march mapped out, they are in a peculiarly receptive state of mind and ripe for socialist propaganda.

Mr. Hearst, having been counted out in New York, after a most extraordinary contest, is now the idol of the people and is being borne swiftly upon the popular current toward the presidential nomination in 1908; and if he is made the standard-bearer of the Democratic Party on a platform declaring against trusts and for government ownership of railroads, telegraphs, and coal mines, there will be a repetition of the New York municipal campaign on a national scale, and the socialist movement will, for the time, be out of the running, and the vote will sink to the lowest reducible point.

We can in some measure prepare for this by shaping our propaganda, program, and platform to suit the exigencies of the situation, without the least sacrifice of principle or modification of revolutionary demand, and may thus tun some of the drift into Socialist channels to the advantage of the party and for the general good of the movement, but in any event, the winds that now and again beat upon the party, as in New York, are not ill winds, as they but sweep from us the chaff, leaving only what can't be blown away, and while we are reduced in size, we are in fact sounder and stronger than before.

But after all that may be said in mitigation of the Socialist campaign in New York, the fact remains that some of the responsibility for the small showing lodged with the Socialists themselves. It is in no spirit of captious criticism that I say this, but only that possible good may come by obviating in future campaigns the errors of the one now closed.

Our candidates in the New York campaign did all they could have done in their places; our active comrades gave them loyal support and the campaign was conducted with ability, pluck, and vigor, but yet there was something essentially lacking, a realizing sense of weakness, and consequent failure to marshal the forces and strike decisive blows in the critical hours of the struggle.

Without attempting to elaborate, it is my conviction that this weakness in the campaign was traceable to two principal sources:

First — The everlasting factional quarreling among socialists themselves, the rancor and vituperation, the interruption of socialist speakers

by other socialists, and the vulgar rows at socialist meetings incited by other socialists, have served to repel and turn back thousands of honest inquirers and searchers after truth, and drive hundreds of socialists from the party organizations in disgust. The time has come for a united Socialist Party in New York and elsewhere;³ the rank and file are ready for it and when we have such a party, and enthusiasm takes the place of disgust, strength will follow weakness and we will have a movement as impervious to Hearstism as granite is to zephyrs.

Second — Our New York comrades have made the mistake to pander to the corrupt and disintegrating pure and simple trade unions, and when the test came, were thrown down in the mud by them. The Socialist Party had been trying to win the pure and simple favors of union corruptionists, and compromised character and principle to do it, and was punished for it with desertion and humiliation.

The pure and simple unionism of New York — foul as carrion and for sale to the highest bidder — smiled like a prostitute upon the Socialist Party until the horn of Hearst was blown and sounded the campaign slogan of “Graft and Boodle,” and then the whole mercenary gang who want “no politics in the union” rushed to the Hearst camp and there remained steadfast and true while there was a dollar in sight or a pocket to pick. The old strumpet, true to her depraved nature, peddled her wares in other markets for ready cash, and now she may return to smile once more upon the credulous and confiding socialists she deserted and betrayed.

The Chicago socialists used to bow and scrape to the moribund and mortgaged old unions, and while they did, they were weak, factious, and contemptible; but they do so no more. They now stand squarely on their own character and hew straight to the revolutionary line, and they have today a united, militant party, and if they maintain that attitude for a year they will have the leading local movement in America.

The socialists of New York may profit by their recent experience. They have everything to lose, including self-respect — and that means moral death — and nothing to gain, by concession to, connection with, or any sort of relation but antagonism to the capitalist-owned, stench-breeding sewers of perverted old trade unionism.

Proletarian integrity, economic and political, is essential to proletarian emancipation.

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¹ William Randolph Hearst, Sr. (1863-1951) was one of the leading newspaper publishers of his day, beginning his career with with the *San Francisco Examiner* before making the *New York Journal* the flagship of his burgeoning newspaper empire in 1895. By the 1920s Hearst owned newspapers in a large number of metropolitan centers, including Boston, Washington, Chicago, Baltimore, Atlanta, Pittsburgh, Omaha, Los Angeles, and Seattle, among others. As a young man Hearst was close to the progressive movement, winning two terms in Congress as a Democrat beginning in 1902. In 1905 Heart made the first of two bids to become mayor of New York City. From the 1930s Heart flipped and emerged as a right wing Republican.

² Edward Fitzsimmons Dunne (1853-1937) was mayor of Chicago from 1905 to 1907. He previously served for 13 years as a Chicago circuit court judge before resigning to run for mayor. A member of the Democratic Party, Dunne was an advocate of municipal ownership of utilities. After defeat in his 1907 bid for reelection, Dunne returned to private legal practice. He staged a political comeback and was elected to a single term as governor of Illinois in 1912.

³ Reference is to a merger of the Socialist Party with the Socialist Labor Party. Negotiations to this end were begun by the Socialist Party of New Jersey, which appointed a 12-member negotiating committee. This was matched a committee of identical size and geographical distribution by the New Jersey sections of the SLP. A series of six meetings took place from Dec. 17, 1905 to March 4, 1906. These ultimately arrived at a basis for SPA-SLP unity on the controversial and decisive questions of relationship of the party to the trade union movement, ownership and control of the party press, and degree of party discipline. Despite consensus between the two negotiating committees, no unity would be forthcoming, however, as the radicals of the Socialist Party of New Jersey could not win a over majority support of the IWW over the AF of L, the elimination of the privately-owned socialist press in favor of a centrally-controlled party-owned press, and adoption of a policy of strict party discipline. See: James M. Reilly and John Hossack (eds.), *Proceedings of New Jersey Socialist Unity Conference*. n.c.: n.p., n.d [1906].