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EDITORIAL

WHENCE COME SOCIALISTS?

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WILSHIRE'S MAGAZINE for the current month publishes an illustrated article under the caption "Socialists in America; Who and What They Are," which purports to give the statistical make-up of the Socialist party as presented in the answers made by about 6,000 of its members—their Union and non-Union affiliations; their occupations; their nativity; the literature they read; their previous political affiliations; etc.

While most of these tables and pictures are unreliable, there is one set of figures, which, tested by all the canons of evidence, may be depended on—and it points the finger to a lesson that should contribute mightily to the overthrow of a certain mischievous superstition.

The valuable set of figures in question is the one that relates to previous political convictions. It shows that 40 per cent of the membership were former Democrats; 35 per cent former Republicans; 15 per cent former Populists; 6 per cent former "Independents"; and 4 per cent former Prohibitionists. In other words, 75 per cent of the total came from the Cimerian Darkness of the Rep-Dem camp and only 15 per cent from the supposedly "towards-the-revolution-marching" Populists.

There is a superstition to the effect that recruits for Socialism are made easiest out of "discontented elements," meaning by this people in active discontent. This is a profound error.

Of course, it goes without saying that a being who is happy in his squalor, in the degradation of his wife and daughters, in the privations of his children—a being who patiently bears the burden of a pack-mule, an animal to which even better treatment is granted than to him, and who looks upon the social contrasts as natural and God-ordained—it goes without saying that with such a being there is nothing to be done: he has to be churned over again: the best that may be hoped for

from him is that the electric discharge of the Social Revolution, when it finally breaks over his head, may have upon him the effect that the burning iron in the hands of an alienist is expected to have upon minds that are comatose—shock him into sense. This is all true. Equally true it is that “discontent,” which is not the result of reasoning from correct foundations, breeds the wild-eyed Utopian, promotes the self-satisfied ranter, attracts the featherbrains whom it sets afire, nurses vainglory, incites the “carrierist” {careerist?} or “get-there-ist.” Apart from the mischief that such elements spread far and wide, they corrode themselves. To a great extent such was the make-up of Populism. At the time, the Socialists were told that the Populists were their natural allies; that they were people bound to graduate forward into Socialism; indeed, that the Populist was a Socialist in the making. Wild language like Gov. Wade’s threatening to “wade in blood up to the bridle of his horse” if “the people did not get their rights” was taken as a substitute for the solid knowledge that sobers, educates, organizes—and PERFORMS with little or no declamation. The small percentage of Populists that passed into the Socialist party, notwithstanding the populist features of row-de-dow that should have made the Socialist party attractive to populists generally, is a fact big with significance to those with brains that think.

Not “discontent” is the soil that breeds the Socialist, but “thoughtfulness.” It is not the “discontented” that the Socialist must direct his propaganda to, but the men capable of thinking. The former, if there is anything in them, will find their way. The latter, however, slower to move, are the forces from which the Revolution will have to draw its strength. To them, whether in the Democratic or the Republican camp, the Socialist must apply. It is easier to convert the man, the tablets of whose mind are unscrawled over, than the man, upon the tablets of whose mind freakishness has scrawled all manner of pothooks.

Out of raw material cloth is spun; out of frayed material shoddy mainly is turned out.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

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