
An Open Letter to David Karsner.

by J. Louis Engdahl

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Through the whirligig of developments in the labor movement you have become managing editor of the *New York Call*. Your restless spirit, that more than 10 years ago couldn't stomach the restrictions of Victor Berger's *Milwaukee Leader*, now satisfies itself midst surroundings that even Berger would find nauseating.

Or perhaps you are not satisfied? Sometimes I feel you are not. You have just wandered into the wrong pew temporarily.

You never did enter much into the political struggle. The carefree individualism of the Industrial Workers of the World appealed to you much more than even the lax discipline of the old Socialist Party. You found greater interest in the "Wobbly" trial in 1918 in Chicago than in the trial of the Socialist officials the same year. You were attracted by the individual personality of William D. Haywood, even as you are drawn to Eugene V. Debs. This in itself indicates an encouraging mental revolt and revolutionary integrity.

We will, therefore, leave politics out of the discussion. It is something foreign to you. It is something that does not find a response in your nature, although you are the managing editor of a purely political publication. You have read much. You have evidently tried to develop a philosophy of your own. I feel that at least a part of the basis of that philosophy is freedom of action; freedom, at least, for thinkers and writers and artists. And that brings me to the point I wish to make.

Your paper is supported by the present officialdom of the Workmen's Circle. Tell me, what

purpose does this officialdom serve by refusing the Workmen's Circle Mandolin Orchestra the right to play, as they desire, at Communist gatherings? Two instances recently, the [Paris] Commune Celebration at the New Star Casino, and the First Annual Jubilee of the *Freiheit* at the Lexington Opera House.

Your paper is supported by the present management of the *Jewish Daily Forward*. Tell me, what purpose does this management serve by threatening to blacklist Ludwig Satz, a comedian on the Jewish stage, if he appeared at the *Freiheit* celebration? Is this any different than the Russian "Black Hundreds" fighting the Moscow Art Theater, or trying to suppress the plays of Gorky, Andreev, and others?

Your paper is supported by the present officialdom of the United Hebrew Trades, New York City. Tell me, what purpose does its manager, Rubin Guskin, also member of the Board of Managers of *The Forward* and President of the Workmen's Circle, serve by successfully intimidating Satz, through his membership in the Actor's Union, of which Guskin is manager, when the *Forward* blacklist failed?

These instances of the Workmen's Circle Mandolin Orchestra and of Ludwig Satz, the comedian, are but two among many others where the elements that have won you, as managing editor of their English-language organ, seek to straightjacket that intellectual freedom that must obtain if ever the world's working class is to develop a culture of its own, that will displace the

degrading capitalist *Kultur* of today.

I was just wondering how you felt in the atmosphere created by those who fear for the existence of their own little dictatorship so much that they must needs resort to such diabolical suppression, even outside the realm of their own narrow activities, because they still possess some modicum of power.

Thus in Chicago, during the recent municipal campaign, the official Socialist organization hysteria banned the sale of the *Debs' Magazine* at meetings addressed by Eugene V. Debs himself, because it did not carry the official seal. And one of the editors of *Debs' Magazine* is Irwin St. John Tucker, also editor of the Chicago Socialist, the official party organ in Chicago. Surely the editors of Socialist publications, these days, do not lie upon a bed of roses, even of yellow or white roses.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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