

Socialist Papers and the Labor Unions:
Letter to the *Chicago Socialist*
(January 18, 1906)

Editor, *Chicago Socialist*:—

Some comrade, I suppose, signing himself “Socialist,” asks me to explain through the *Chicago Socialist* why “the press of the Socialist Party is so friendly to the Gompers unions that are opposed to socialism, and so bitterly opposed to the Industrial Workers of the World that is in favor of socialism.”

I would rather that “Socialist” had signed his or her name. Socialists, as a rule, are open and above board and little given to anonymous letter writing. Still, the writer may have good reason for remaining unknown, and so I answer as requested.

Strictly speaking, the Socialist Party has no press.¹ The papers published in the interest of the Socialist Party are owned by party members, but not by the party; and they are not necessarily the exponents of party policy, nor is the party in any way responsible for their attitude.

Therefore, the socialist papers that oppose the Industrial Workers do so purely on their own account as personal publications, and not in any sense as the party press, any more than the socialist papers that favor the Industrial Workers do so as party papers.

The party, as a party, has no press, and the party, as a party is no more committed to the American Federation of Labor than it is to the Industrial Workers.

The Socialist Party, in general terms, commends trade unionism, but expresses no partiality to any particular organization. Its policy is that of strict neutrality. A member may, therefore, with equal consistency, belong to the IWW, the AF of L, or to no union at all, as he may elect, so far as the party is concerned.

That is the present attitude of the party, and it cannot be twisted in favor of any particular organization, and any attempt to do so is very apt to result in trouble.

As to the reason for certain socialist papers opposing the Industrial Workers, that is their own personal affair. I may question their

consistency, but not their right to pursue any policy that to them seems proper. If they were party-owned papers, it would be different.

“Socialist” must have heard of the law of economic determinism. The law was discovered by socialists, but socialists are no more exempt from it than was Newton from the law of gravitation. The papers in question oppose the Industrial Workers because a majority of their union labor subscribers belong to the American Federation of Labor. In due course of time they will all be supporting the Industrial Workers of the World.

Yours fraternally,

Eugene V. Debs.

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¹ Debs oversimplifies here. The 1904 National Convention voted to initiate a monthly newspaper dedicated to party affairs, the *Socialist Party Official Bulletin*. The first issue of this paper was published in September of that same year for distribution to the entire party membership at meetings of locals and branches. It continued through March 1913. The national office also published a mimeographed *Weekly Bulletin* for members of the national committee and national executive committee, state secretaries, and representatives of the privately-owned socialist press.