

The Chicago Movement [excerpt] (September 8, 1911)

When the article ... which appeared in the *Daily Socialist* of the 22nd inst. [Aug. 22, 1911] was written,¹ it was to criticize in a general way what I believed to be a mistaken policy and not to provoke a controversy. General terms were sufficient, it seemed to me, to make myself clear, and I purposely avoided unnecessary detail. In his answer the editor declares that my article "is encumbered with a mass of generalities, euphonious predictions, and misstatements of facts," and then proceeds, at random, with the intimation that he did not really know what I was driving at. His readers, the rank and file, were under no such disadvantage, as the many letters received from them amply testify. They roundly grasped my meaning. I knew they would because they always do.

* * *

In his reply to my criticism the editor intimated that because my article was only "a mass of generalities" and not specific in a single instance, it lacked point, and that there was no real ground for my complaint. This makes it necessary for me to enter into detail just sufficiently to show that I could have been very "specific" had I been so inclined.

When I spoke at Riverview Park, Chicago, in September last,² along the lines of the editorial above quoted, that part of my speech was cut out of the *Daily Socialist*, for fear, doubtless, of offending the grafting trade union leaders, who that very day were denouncing the socialists at their meeting in the most violent terms.

During the strike of the garment workers last winter, when I wrote an article for the *Daily Socialist*, appealing for the support of organized labor and incidentally exposing the impotency of craft unionism in that struggle, the vital passages were cut out of that article before it was allowed to appear, because of the "scrupulous care" not to offend some of the crooked leaders who betrayed that strike and forced the outraged employees back into the sweating dens of the brutal bosses.

During that strike the *Daily* did grand work, and I want to give it full credit for all it did, but it destroyed much of the effect at the close when instead of fighting for the strikers to the last ditch, as it should have done,

it permitted itself, from considerations for spineless and treacherous craft union leaders, to take a stand that provoked the charge on the part of a good many union men and socialists that it had betrayed the strikers.

Again, when Haywood was in Chicago the *Daily Socialist* ignored him and did not so much as make an announcement of his meetings. Had it been Gompers, the Civic Federation reactionist, instead of Haywood, the working class revolutionist, he would have been interviewed, his portrait would have appeared on the first page, and his speech published at length.

Which of these two, as representatives of the working class, is entitled to the greater consideration of a sound and fearless socialist paper? This Haywood incident in itself, taken in connection with the *Daily's* usual treatment of Gompers, illuminates the whole situation. A good deal more might be said upon this point, but it is not necessary.

Finally, the editor of the *Socialist* would now have it appear that I am opposed to having anything at all to do with the trade unions, that I am "piqued" against them, and that this is really the crux of the whole matter. Nothing could be farther from the truth. No one is more heartily in favor of dealing with the unions, the rank and file, than I, but not by catering to their corrupt and reactionary leaders. That is really the point of difference, and upon that point I am everlastingly right, and in his hearing the editor of the *Socialist* knows it, and so do all the rest of those who stand for the "catering" policy, which has brought the Socialist Party into contempt with even those to whom it has catered.

I am for fighting every battle of the trade unions, the rank and file, from start to finish, always holding before them, however, the ideal of industrial unionism and pointing the straight road to emancipation. I am for McNamara, the trade union official, have been from the start, and shall be to the end. But I am against the crooks, grafters, and misleaders, who are a curse to the movement, and no paper that exercises "scrupulous care" not to offend these can be true to the working class.

The editor of the *Daily Socialist* was right when he proposed in the editorial above quoted, which appeared in April last, to "mercilessly expose" every crooked leader in Chicago who betrayed his followers, but how many of such crooks has the *Daily Socialist* exposed since that announcement was made? If a single one I do not happen to know of the case. Instead of exposing the grafters the *Daily Socialist* has continued to have "scrupulous care" not to offend them.

I am for getting close to the trade unions and proving that we are the friends of the rank and file by fighting their battles. I am for appealing to

them in every possible way and using every means at our command to educate them and to bring them to understand the weakness and impotency of craft unionism and the impregnable power of industrial unionism.

I believe also in preserving the revolutionary integrity of the socialist movement and compromising not one jot to win the power of trade unionists or anyone else. That is precisely the way not to get it, but contempt instead.

We have socialists who go to the American Federation of Labor conventions and there move to raise the salary of Gompers, the Civic Federation misleader of the working class, and then about the time some of the delegates are having their eyes opened as to who he is and what he stands for, move to reelect him by acclamation. I am not one of those. I have no use for the Gompers brand of unionism and I want none of it in the Socialist Party.

Does Gompers have any respect of the socialists who go to the AF of L conventions to increase his salary and make his election unanimous? No; he has only contempt for them, and rightly so. How can even Gompers have any respect for socialists who applaud and cheer him after he has denounced their party in every conceivable way and published the charge broadcast that their campaign funds were furnished by the Republican Party?

I am absolutely opposed to any AF of L domination of the Socialist Party and as strenuously opposed to any catering, dickering, or compromising, "silently or otherwise," to its reactionary leaders, national or local, or to the unions themselves, to catch their votes or secure any other favors at their hands.

Let us pursue the straight course, preach sound economic and political doctrine, steer clear of crooks of all description, especially those conspicuously wearing union badges, and depend upon the trade unionists to come to us as rapidly as they learn that we stand staunchly and unwaveringly for their emancipation.

If the editor of the *Socialist* will publish the vote secured by Dr. Smith, the Socialist candidate for mayor and the year in which he ran, together with the vote of Rodriguez, the Socialist candidate for mayor in [April 1911], he will know what I meant when I said that the present vote was smaller than it was twenty years ago, a statement made by old socialists in Chicago when comparing the large vote cast then with the small vote cast now to show that anything but satisfactory progress had been made in building up a socialist movement in Chicago....

Published in *Chicago Daily Socialist*, vol. 5, no. 266 (Sept. 8, 1911), p. 6.

¹ "The Failure of Weak and Compromising Tactics in Chicago," *Chicago Daily Socialist*, Aug. 22, 1911, THIS VOLUME.

² "Working Class Politics: Speech at Riverfront Park, Chicago" (Sept. 18, 1910), *Selected Works of Eugene V. Debs, Volume 4*, pp. XX-XX.