
The Situation in New York City.

Statement by the National Executive Committee, Socialist Labor Party, to the Party Membership and to Voters of the SLP Ticket Throughout the Land

Originally published in *The People*, May 1, 1899. Reprinted in *Proceedings of the Tenth National Convention of the Socialist Labor Party*. (New York: New York Labor News Co., 1901), pp. 278-286.

Comrades:—

As the Socialist Movement develops, constantly gaining in strength, momentum, and aggressiveness, forging ahead over obstacles previously deemed insurmountable, it naturally happens from time to time that some of those who formerly were in the front rank, unable to keep the pace with the advancing column, fall behind, and, after vainly calling for a halt, are left in the rear if not lost to the cause.

At such times it unavoidably happens also that bitter personalities are indulged in; because the great fact is not yet generally comprehended — or is too frequently lost sight of by those even who comprehend it — that social movements, or diverging tendencies within those movements, are not the product of their so-called leaders, but that the inverse proposition is true. The existence of differences is therefore, as a rule, wrongly imputed to those who, selected as agents or mouthpieces of the movements or tendencies to which they respectively contribute their individual efforts, sympathetically reflect in their acts or utterances, with such powers as they possess, the collective sentiment of their respective constituents. Manifestly, a mere change of mouthpieces would not change opinions, while any sort of compromise with a view to “harmony” could only result in emphasizing the divergences by closer friction; so that in the end the unavoidable crises would come, intensified by additional elements of discord.

It is through such a crisis that the Socialist Movement is now passing in New York City; a crisis brought about, not suddenly by the deeds or words of impetuous men, but gradually by the slow and logical working of forces, which, originally starting from the same point and for a time apparently moving in the same direction, began years ago to display opposite tenden-

cies. But it is precisely from such crises that the Socialist Movement has always and in every country emerged stronger, until at last it became irresistible wherever it had succeeded in overcoming the internal resistances to its advance along the lines plainly marked out by the class struggle.

On occasions of this gravity, however, it is highly important that every fact of unquestionable authenticity and value, tending to enlighten those upon whom the movement must depend for its integrity and progress, be submitted to their most dispassionate consideration. With this end in view, and hoping that no previous association, no present environment, no influence other than the sense of right, and no irrelevant or secondary matter of dispute, may interfere with the exercise of judgment and consistent action, the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Labor Party has therefore deemed it its duty to the membership of said Party — and to those who, though not yet members, are in full sympathy with its great aim and support it at the ballot box, but might be misled by inaccurate information — to publicly issue the following statement.

This step, in fact, has been rendered imperative by the hostile position which certain members and non-members, availing themselves of their editorial command over a paper heretofore considered a Socialist organ, and claiming a right of criticism to the extent of public attack, have publicly taken upon questions, not only of so-called “tactics” but of fundamental principle, pertaining to the Party, repeatedly settled by its national and state conventions, settled again, through the referendum, by an overwhelming majority of its membership, yet always open to free discussion within its organization.

Comrades:—

As you all know, the seed of modern Socialism was first planted in American soil by German militants a generation ago. Their self-imposed task was onerous and thankless; their labors remained for a long time unproductive. There was here in those days no “labor movement” in the true meaning which a class-conscious proletariat attaches to this expression. The undeveloped country was still then affording numberless opportunities to middle class aspirations. Individualism of the meanest sort was rampant; solidarity an unknown word. The only purpose of such labor organization as there could be under the prevailing conditions was to maintain wages at a point where, by “saving,” the worker could at last become a small “boss.” He resigned himself to be skinned for a time in order to become a skinner of his fellows. The “smartest” man — that is, the most cunning and unscrupulous in the choice of means to attain this end — was the natural leader of a labor body composed of such elements. And as politics presented occasions of pecuniary and social advancement to men of glib tongue and absent conscience, every labor leader was a politician.

The six years’ crisis that began in 1873, by reducing the American working class to a condition of helplessness sufficiently suggestive of its inexorable fate under capitalism, gave the German comrades, chiefly in New York City, their first opportunity of agitation among people of other nationalities. They improved it to the utmost of their limited means. But economic education is a plant of slow growth, especially in its primary stages and in a soil long productive of the rankest weeds.

Moreover, Socialist agitation, ever so well systematized in Germany, was still here in its experimental stage. At any rate they spread Socialist doctrine, made some converts, and in order to give a practical illustration of their methods and purposes, they constituted a Socialist Party and boldly undertook, with their scant resources, to issue a Socialist daily paper in the German language, namely, the *New Yorker Volkszeitung*.

In this last enterprise they had to comply with the capitalistic law of the State of New York by forming an association that would nominally own the paper, and which they named “The Socialistic Cooperative Publishing Association.” But it was understood

that the paper was actually, then and forever, the property of the Party, subject in all its utterances to the will of the Party, and amenable at all times to that truly social-democratic, self-imposed and self-enforced discipline of the Party, of which Germany, under the anti-Socialist Bismarckian “laws of exception,” was at that very moment giving the world a magnificent example.

Of course, within the Party, but only within it, the editors, like any other members thereof, not only could ventilate with the utmost freedom any personal views which they might entertain, but were expected to do so; and it was not deemed possible that the day might come when a non-member of the Party could be called upon to occupy the chair of editor-in-chief, or even the position of sub-editor, and, as such, oppose in the columns of the paper the tactics of the Party, criticize its program, or do ought that could in any way give aid and comfort to its enemies — all in the name of freedom, as understood by the anarchists.

The *Volkszeitung* went on. Armed with this precious weapon, the New York Socialists of 1878 placed a municipal ticket in the field and cast about 1,700 votes for their mayoralty candidate. Most of the trade unions that survived the crisis were skeletons. The only ones that showed any signs of life were German organizations, thoroughly imbued with the Socialist spirit. With the revival of capitalistic business in 1879 and 1880, trade unionism emerged from its torpid state. The most active, the most earnest agents of this awakening were German Socialists, seconded by a few men of other nationalities, who professed conversion to Socialism or at least sympathy approximating conversion. Their great cry, “Organize! Organize! Organize!” was taken up everywhere. They did not at first conceive that an organization for economic war against individual capitalists could not of itself so emphasize the class struggle and so plainly suggest the right mode of action, as to logically, necessarily bring about its own evolution into an organization for political war against capitalism. Lulled by fakirs who fattened on their dues and profited by their misspent activity in the building up of pure and simple trade unions, they patiently waited to see the “inevitable” result. Seeing nothing, they finally began to “bore from the inside.” They bored so well that in 1880 they found themselves outside of Socialism and in the mire of Greenbackism. Retracing their steps, they bored again

from within and in 1886 fell out into the still deeper mire of Single Taxism. Disgusted, as they might well have been, they withdrew their economic organizations from the Central Labor Union, formed a central body of their own and quietly attended to their economic fights. At about that time (1888) the Party was so low that, having taken the political field in New York City for the mere purpose of testing its strength, only about 2,000 votes were cast for its candidates — or hardly more than ten years before, despite the enormous growth of the wage-working German population in the American metropolis and the immense progress of Socialism in Germany. In no other part of the country could the Party give even so weak a sign of remaining life.

Such was the outcome of the “tactics” which the *Volkszeitung* would have us revive.

These tactics, so-called, were abandoned in 1890, and others substituted, of which the present ones are the direct, logical evolution. The advance of the Party since then is a matter of such well known record that we may dispense with any comments upon it.

The fact, however, should right here be stated, that at no time and under no circumstances did the *Volkszeitung* aid the Party in carrying out its changed policy; but that many times and in many ways — by editorial silence or innuendo, by reportorial incompleteness or blue pencil work, and at last by outspoken opposition — it endeavored to discredit that policy which it was in duty bound by the laws of ethics, by its professions of loyalty, and by its constitution, to sustain and promote.

As we have already observed, diverging tendencies are not the creation of their respective mouthpieces. The contrary is true, and it was idle to blame the mouthpieces for their own existence. But the actual fact in the case of the *Volkszeitung* is that it attempted the impossible task of not being the mouthpiece of any particular tendency in the labor movement, and that, when the divergences became too great to permit such “impartiality,” it was driven by the legitimate dissatisfaction of the SLP with its tepid loyalty, into an attitude of hot disloyalty.

The admission has indeed repeatedly been made, by members of the Socialistic Cooperative Publishing Association and by members of its board of directors, that if the *Volkszeitung* were to sustain the uncompro-

missing policy of the SLP, its existence might be placed in jeopardy by a loss of the support which it now received from various labor organizations! That is, we dare say, a confession of impotence not less painful than suggestive, and for which there would be no occasion if, applauding as it should have done, the abandonment of cowardly tactics, and welcoming, as it should have done, the adoption of an energetic policy — of the only policy consistent with the teachings of revolutionary socialism — the *Volkszeitung* had cast away such support as it could get from pure and simplers and their anarchist associates, revived the drooping spirits of German comrades exhausted by fruitless attempts to travel an impracticable road, and faced the enemy at every point. Nor is it too late for such manly action. With 82,000 Socialist votes behind us and daily reports before us of steady progress, the ground is beyond question incalculably safer than it was eight years ago. Moreover, we do not believe that a majority of the Socialistic Cooperative Publishing Association are cowards or traitors. On the contrary, we do believe that all of its members, with the exception of a few anarchists and some other pronounced Party enemies, are loyal to the Party; that they are willing to sustain it at any cost and at all hazards; but that the minds of a number of them have been poisoned in an atmosphere long impregnated with timorousness and disloyalty, and now filled with the subtle venom of personal animosity. It is, therefore, with a friendly feeling that we publicly call upon the Socialistic Cooperative Publishing Association to disown the hostility of its present editors, and to prove its loyalty by enforcing its constitution.

Of the claim which those editors set forth, in defiance of the said constitution, that they commit no act of disloyalty in publicly opposing the “tactics” of the Party, we should not specially speak here if what they term “tactics” was not so closely related to the fundamental principle of the class struggle as to involve the Socialist Movement in its entirety. That the attitude of the Party concerning the nature of trade unionism is erroneously considered by some German comrades in this country as a mere matter of tactics, happens from the fact that in Germany, as in France and Belgium, trade unionism is overwhelmingly socialistic. There was no occasion in those countries for asserting in the Socialist declaration of principles the

necessity of a condition which was in existence and the existence of which was taken as a matter of course. But the occasion arose in the international congresses as soon as the Socialist parties and the Socialist trade unions of those countries found themselves confronted by the pure and simple anti-Socialist trade unions of Great Britain and by the anarchists of everywhere. Hence the emphatic declaration at London, in 1896, that no labor organization shall be entitled to representation in international congresses unless it recognizes the necessity of political action upon class lines; that is, upon the Socialist lines of battle. That settles this issue.

Another matter to which we must here call attention is the rash act of the said editors in attempting to dispute the position of the SLP on the subject of taxation and hiring for that purpose a voluble logomachist who never knew on what side of the fence he could most safely stand upon any question.

The disloyalty here is most flagrant. After years of silent acquiescence, during which the editors of the *Volkszeitung* not only had every opportunity of making themselves heard in the councils of the Party, but were in duty bound to express their dissent in those councils if they actually entertained contrary views, they now suddenly — without provocation, without warning, and in the same spirit already displayed in their attacks upon the Party's trade union principle — opened in the columns of the paper a campaign of confusion against the simple, clear, and radically true formula which the SLP is victoriously opposing to the most insidious and most bamboozling declarations of middle-class parties.

There is no room in this address for a discourse on taxation; and we must for the present confine ourselves to an emphatic reassertion of the fundamental principle enunciated in the New York State platform of 1895 and in the Municipal Program of the SLP; which, together with the not less fundamental posi-

tion of the Party on trade unionism, has been loyally maintained by the Party's English organ, *The People*, and its German organ, *Vorwaerts*.

But whether the editors of the *Volkszeitung* be permitted to continue in their perverse course, or whether the Socialistic Cooperative Publishing Association, aroused by their conduct, take against them such action as the case obviously requires, the duty now devolves upon this National Executive Committee of presenting a complete and dispassionate argument, setting forth all the grounds upon which the SLP rests its general declaration. With this end in view a leaflet is being prepared on the subject of taxation.

Lastly, attention is called to the below Appendix, in substantiation of the charges herein made and in further evidence of the *Volkszeitung's* hostility to the Party's interests, as displayed by the editors of the said *Volkszeitung* in their treatment of the "Haverhill Armory Social Democracy."

In conclusion, comrades, having laid before you a chain of facts so specific, so indisputable, and so closely related to nature and sequence as to leave no room for misinterpretation or sophistry, we may fully trust for the rest in your clear Socialist perception and uncompromising Socialist spirit.

Alvan S. Brown
Patrick Murphy
John J. Kinneally
C.H. Matchett
Lucien Sanial
Arthur Keep

Dissenting:
Henry Stall

Countersigned and in favor:
Henry Kuhn, National Secretary

Appendix

[Note:— For the perfect understanding of the falsifications, suppressions, and other wrongs purposely committed by the *Volkszeitung*, as shown in the following quotations, it is necessary to know and to bear in mind that the *Vorwaerts*, official German organ of the SLP, is also the weekly edition of the *New Yorker Volkszeitung*. The editors of the latter cannot adulterate the weekly *Vorwaerts*, but they boldly, unscrupulously adulterate its articles when taking them over into the columns of the daily *Volkszeitung*.]

I.

Public Opposition to Party Tactics on the Subject of Trade Unionism.

1. *Vorwaerts*, Feb. 19, 1898, has article on New Bedford strike of that month, showing how the strike of 1894 had not fructified the labor movement of that city, despite Socialist speakers; the efforts of these rebounded, as formerly, only in favor of the fakirs; the SLP vote remained small, and subsequently even went down (154); in February 1898, however, the Socialists adopted new tactics; their agitation took the practical form of organizing the strikers into the Socialist Trade & Labor Alliance; owing to this circumstance the expectation was justified that Socialist agitation would not then prove barren, it would withdraw the workers from the fakirs' influence. —*This article was suppressed by the Volkszeitung.*

2. *Vorwaerts*, Feb. 26, 1898, has article on same subject and same lines, and sums up saying: Whether this (Socialist) propaganda among the strikers will prove of lasting effect depends upon whether these strikers are brought, also in their economic efforts, into permanent contact with the Socialist Labor Party "by joining the Socialist Trade & Labor Alliance." —This article was *mutilated by the Volkszeitung*: the above passage, given in quotation marks, was *stricken out*, and the whole article was thereby deprived of its only point, and given the tone of the old time Party's tactics and principles that had been rejected by the national convention of 1896.

[N.B.— The forecast in the *Vorwaerts* that the new trade union principles and tactics of the Party justified the expectation of tangible results was speedily verified. At the by-election for Congress in New Bedford, June 1898, the Party's vote rose from 154 to

over 700, and, at the following November elections of the same year, the vote rose several hundreds more.]

3. On Dec. 14 and 19, 1898, commenting upon the Kansas City convention of the pure and simple AF of L, the *Volkszeitung* made successively the two following more open attacks upon the Party's trade union policy:

"The comfort of these two elements was formerly not quite so well provided for at the time when there were more Socialist pikes in the pond; at the time, namely, when a part of these had not yet chosen to lead, outside of the American Federation, a separate existence of doubtful success, instead of, as formerly, tirelessly, unflinchingly, step by step, boring their way forward from within. At that time, the corruptionists of the labor movement always felt quite uncomfortable at the opening of every annual convention, because they were in the dark as to the strength in which the Socialists might turn up, as to the weapons of attack these might be equipped with, and as to how far these would succeed in making breaches in the ranks of the shaky. This sense of uneasiness is now wholly vanished." —(Dec. 14.)

"Does it not now dawn upon certain of our own comrades that their favorite, frequently untactful form of attack against the non-Socialist trades union movement, and, in connection therewith, their own separate trades union tactics, has placed in the hands of the corrupt foes of Socialism in the convention at Kansas City the very weapons that could not fail to retard the flow of the Socialist current?" —(Dec. 19.)

4. *Vorwaerts*, March 18, 1899, describes the effectiveness of the ST&LA in the Allegheny strike, and

the needfulness of the Party's tactics on trade unionism, and clinches the point with illustrations. — *This article was mutilated in the Volkszeitung of the same date; all allusion to the ST&LA is stricken out; and what is left thus conveys the idea that the same old tactics had been adopted and had proved successful.*

5. *Volkszeitung*, March 25, 1899, has an original article in which the Allegheny strike and its excellent results for the cause of labor are referred to as though the tactics of which these were due were the old tactics recommended by the *Volkszeitung*. He who is not posted would miss the point that only through the ST&LA was such success had, and would be misled into confidence in the old and rejected tactics.

6. Comrade Forker, writing from Rhode Island on the elections just held there on April 5, 1890, sent to the *Volkszeitung* a communication in the course of which the important role of the ST&LA in that successful election was described. — *The Volkszeitung mutilated Forker's communication, leaving out all mention of the ST&LA, and when the Vorwaerts asked for the communication to give the German comrades outside of New York the benefit thereof, the Forker communication could not be found.*

7. On April 3 the *Volkszeitung* reported about the Whitestone Association of Marble Polishers, which, in order to prevent the organization of its trade and to keep a monopoly of the trade to itself, placed the admission fee at \$50, then raised it to \$100, and then, failing in its purpose to keep away applicants, absolutely refused to take in new members. Commenting upon this, the *Volkszeitung* of April 4 and 5 declared that, *even so, the organization of a rival union is not allowable, and would be a blow in the face of solidarity of the working class whether on the economic or the political field.*"

8. The *Vorwaerts*, April 15, 1899, had an article exposing the fraudulent claims now being made of increases in wages in the cotton industries, of New England especially; and it drew black upon black the dismal, helpless future of the textile workers — were it not, the *Vorwaerts* closes saying, for the ray of light and hope shed across their path by the election re-

turns from Rhode Island where, thanks to the organization of the ST&LA among the textile workers, such an intelligent and vigorous spirit animates the men that their struggles will be successful and beneficent for the textile proletariat. — *This whole closing paragraph is suppressed by the Volkszeitung of the same date, thus leaving the article a dead stone.*

II.

Violation of the Party's Principles and Tactics on Taxation.

1. The *Volkszeitung*, March 7, has an article (evidently directed against *The People's* "Uncle Sam and Brother Jonathan" of two days previous), in which, contrary to scientific economics, contrary to statistical facts, and contrary to the Party's national declaration (Municipal Program issued by NEC) and the declaration of the Party of the State of New York, the *Volkszeitung* maintains that the taxes are paid by the working class out of its wages; and in which, seeking to show the importance of the discovery, it argues with false figures that the Fifty-fifth Congress has imposed a burden of taxation of \$100 a year on every family; and it has during the last four weeks continuously pursued the same lines, combatting *The People*, to the injury of the Party, whose otherwise supporters cannot fail thereby to be rendered accessible to bourgeois "tax reform" political planks in their endeavor to quickly throw off so heavy a burden of taxation as \$100 a year which they are falsely made believe by the *Volkszeitung* that they are loaded with.

2. *Vorwaerts*, April 22, has an article on "Demagogic Taxation Politics," in which it proves with statistical figures that "the question of taxation can, under no circumstances, be of importance to the workingmen," that "their condition is not affected by changes in capitalist taxation policies," that "the theory upon which the tax-politicians seek to talk the workingmen into feeling interested in the question of taxation is the claim that taxes are a pressing burden on the workingmen, and that the removal or curtailment of taxes would bring an improvement of their condition," and that the "theory is absurd." — This article was sup-

pressed by the *Volkszeitung*, thus suppressing the Party's voice and rendering the Party tongue-tied toward the German element in this city.

III.

Hostility to the Party's Interests by Giving Aid and Comfort to the Manifestly Ignorant and Corrupt "Haverhill Social Democracy."

1. The *Volkszeitung* has systematically suppressed all information appearing in The People or the Vorwaerts that is damaging to the "Haverhill Social Democracy."

(a) It suppressed the Corcoran letter and all the other numerous letters that were published from Massachusetts comrades showing Mayor Chase to be a crook and an ignoramus; and showing, from bourgeois paper clippings themselves, how Chase and Carey were denying the class struggle, were fishing for bourgeois support, and were seeking to establish harmony between capitalists and workingmen, were supporting pure and simple politics in Marlboro; and were considered "good Socialists" by the bourgeois press;

(b) It suppressed the letter that was reproduced from the Haverhill *Gazette*, signed by a Democratic candidate, showing that political deals had been made between the "Social Democrats" and the "Regular Democrats," and that Carey was cognizant thereof — a statement that, although appearing in print in his own city, Carey did not dare deny;

(c) It suppressed the information that the first official act of Mayor Chase was the appointment of a notorious Democratic politician *as his private secretary*, thus beginning to "redeem pledges";

and

(d) It suppressed the more recent information that the "Haverhill Social Democracy" had raised funds from the "liquor interests."

2. The *Volkszeitung*, Dec. 31, 1898, while declaring with general phrases that the conduct of Carey, in supporting and voting for a \$15,000 appropriation for building a new armory, is not a class-conscious act, dodges the real point at issue, the evident corruption of the act, and the still more evident dishonesty of the defense. The *Volkszeitung* of that date gives editorially Carey's defense in full, including the idiotic claim about his "liability to a severe fine," had he acted otherwise, and then it says:

"So much for the plea of his supporters, *upon the correctness of which we are not able to judge.*" !!!

Not able to judge upon the details of a plea that bears on its face the stamp of fraud, and that could hardly impose even upon a child of average sense!

3. The *Volkszeitung*, Jan. 24, 1899, puts in a good word for the corruptionist and bourgeois Mayor Chase by misstating an important fact. In the article of that date entitled, "Two Mayors," it compares Mayor Jones of Toledo with Mayor Chase of Haverhill. It has much general talk against both on their "humanity," etc., language, but finally says of Chase:

"What, indeed, distinguishes him favorably from the other [Jones] is that he evidently addresses himself knowingly to the right element, i.e., to the workingmen who are organized for the economic battle against capital."

The facts are just the reverse, and were illustrated in this very city at the very time that the article was written. Jones was just then in New York addressing "organized workingmen," the Letter Carriers, while the information, all along suppressed by the *Volkszeitung*, showed right along that Chases was preeminently addressing himself to bourgeois while Jones was the chap who was seeking workingmen's audiences. Indeed, Jones, who imagines he has the bourgeois with him, is straining for workingmen supporters, while Chase, who imagines he has captured the workers, is conspicuously straining for a bourgeois following.