

## SOCIALISM

Mr. Obenchain Has a Word to Say to the Populists—Believes They Should all Become Socialists

Editor Independent: Were I to speak to the populists today—having been one of them—it would be with no word of discouragement. As a party we came into existence a protest against existing conditions. We fought as best we knew and have the encouragement of seeing principles, at first hooted and derided, now seriously considered and permanently fixed in the minds of a majority of the people. In the education incident to this struggle, we ourselves have advanced and ideas that once seemed revolutionary are now seen to be only palliative. Thus the education goes on, and the day of real achievements will be hastened or delayed accordingly as we concentrate or dissipate our energies.

The populist party of more than 2,000,000 voters, what has become of it? Many have returned to former political affiliations discouraged and hopeless. Others are silent onlookers politically, while the great majority have been absorbed by the democratic party—and what is that party? It is the herculean struggle of Mr. Bryan's life to hold it to the principles declared for in 1896. Think of it. After seven years it is a life and death struggle within the party, not as to whether it shall advance, but whether it shall recede from the advanced step already taken. I have no censure for either those who went into or for those who staid out of the fusion deal. I am satisfied all were making the fight of their lives as duty prompted. The logic of conditions was insurmountable, and if the populists had pursued an opposite course and the democrats have lost the presidency, as they surely would—and did—the populists would have been held responsible, and, under the odium of this charge, they could never have gained recruits from out of the ranks of those charging them with this perfidy. The party could not have acted differently and retained its prestige as a party any more than it has done. Nor, in all these seven years of history, have I had an unkind word for Mr. Bryan. He, too, was making the fight of his life, is still fighting and will fight on to the end for reform as he sees it. That he has ideas far in advance of anything he is contending for, is doubtless true, and when he is forced out of his present environment there is no telling to what advanced step he may go. But, mark you, to be able to carry the greatest following with him, he must be driven out. To go out inopportunely would be welcomed with the greatest delight by the capitalist element of the party, as the best means of crushing his influence.

But, to turn aside from this brief summary of the situation leading up to the present, what of the future? I believe we are on the threshold of a political revolution. A revolution along lines more radical than anything populists contend for—more radical than was ever contended for before. The principle of competition itself is being assailed and the principle of universal co-operation being advocated. Private capitalism, with its attendant evils of profit and interest, is being regarded as uneconomic, wasteful and the greatest of all means of exploitation. Anyone can understand that, deprived of the power of extorting profit, rent and interest, there could not today be a millionaire in all the land. No man could possibly have more than the value of his own accumulated industry, and this means that no man could be exploited of his wages.

The question to which the world is just awakening, is: Are the wealth-creators entitled to the full value of the wealth they create? The question itself is an insult to justice. That it should be propounded at this advanced age of civilization, much less seriously considered, is one of the marvels that will puzzle future generations. As it is, half the world is not aware that such a proposition is in question—inflaming, perhaps, at the intimation. And yet the last census reports show that the average laborer gets only \$437 of the \$2,451 his labor produces in a year. Once this fact becomes consciously fixed in the minds of the working masses, no middle-class or palliative movement will appeal to them for a moment. Nothing but the complete overthrow of the system responsible for such highway robbery. This will be a movement that will not stop with the "government ownership" of the railroads and telegraph, but will demand that all the machinery of production be taken over by the government or by the people collectively. This will be socialism. Socialism is simply the living protest of plundered labor against the private ownership of the tools of production

which enables the owners of these tools, but who do not use them, to compel the men who do use them, but do not own them, to give four-fifths of all they create for the privilege of using these tools. Under private capitalism and the principle of competition there is no remedy. The system itself must be abolished. There cannot be any half-way ground or government ownership under a capitalist system without a continual clash of private and public interests and, as a result, the greatest incentive for official corruption. The populist party has served its mission. It has prepared the people for the next step, and, in my estimation, it will make a great mistake if it attempts by independent action to thwart the onward movement by a revival of the fight along old populist lines. The whole scheme of capitalist exploitation should be exposed and abolished. This means the introduction of the co-operative commonwealth, under which all labor will have free access to the tools of production. This means that no man can live off the toil of another. That the whole system of production will be for use and not for profit, and under this system all, co-operatively, will be the beneficiaries of each new invention and discovery in science that lessens the hours of labor without, as now, lessening labor's product. As a populist and an enthusiastic supporter of its principles in the past, I ask brother populists to seriously consider socialism as the coming movement—a movement that goes to the bottom of the whole social and industrial fabric. It is fundamental and has its foundation upon justice.

C. E. OBENCHAIN.

Greenville, Tex.

(Mr. Obenchain certainly makes a good argument—but is it in harmony with scientific socialism? Does he accept as final the Marxian doctrine of "surplus value," which, as The Independent views it, is a labored attempt to say that the wage-worker isn't paid all he is entitled to. Does Mr. Obenchain believe in the "class struggle," and in "economic determinism?" If he does, then, he ought to see the folly of expecting the property-owning "middle class" to join, in any great numbers, a proletarian movement. Having no property interests to conserve, the proletariat might join with any party—and the fact is, the wage-workers do constitute the strength of the republican and democratic parties—especially the former.)

But is it reasonable to expect the average manufacturer, railroad magnate, banker—any of the "grand bourgeoisie" to ally himself with the propertyless, wage-workers' party? Hardly. There might be one in an hundred thousand—and even he would rest under the suspicion that he had "an axe to grind." Is it any more reasonable to expect the farmer, small business man, home-owner—any of the little fellows, the "petit bourgeoisie"—to join the proletarian movement? No; assuredly, no. The teachings of socialism ought, if studied with care, to show socialists themselves the absurdity of this latest "fad."

Holding to the rigid doctrine of "surplus value" exploitation of the wage-worker, and denying that exploitation in any other way can account for the present inequitable distribution of wealth, socialists must admit that, according to their own formula, the farmer or other producer who works for himself cannot be "exploited." What if he is robbed through unjust taxation, through extortionate freight rates, through a protective tariff? These do not count—the scientific socialists say. Only through the "surplus value" route can one become a billionaire!

But what about the "class struggle," by means of which, through all the ages, the enslaved classes—if we may believe the socialists—have secured more and more of the things to which they are justly entitled? Haven't these things come about through the contests between different bands of exploiters? And are we now to forsake the materialism of Marx and believe that if we shall go forth with a message of glad tidings to the "petit bourgeoisie," that they will stifle their "egoistic impulses" and with a wild hurrah forsake the advantages they now hold over the man with no property and join him in his movement to accomplish the "collective ownership of all the means of production and distribution?" That isn't unreasonable, if we reason from proper premises—but we are discussing this question from the standpoint of socialism.

When socialists abandon the theory of "surplus value" and modify their crass materialism, they and the populists may be able to come to an understanding. When they do this, they will have modified that all-inclusive demand for the collective ownership of everything that enters into the production of wealth. They will recognize that collective ownership is only



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necessary where the division of labor is carried to extremes and where, by the very nature of the production and the machines used, individual ownership by him who does the work is not possible, or not desirable, even if possible. But then the socialists will all be populists.—Associate Editor.)

### Happy Moments

Editor Independent: I am very much interested in the article in the last issue, headed "Nebraska Populism." Here it was born, yes, thank God, and the happiest moments of my life were July 4, 1892, while I sat in the Coliseum building in Omaha and witnessed the birth of our grand party, and why, because it was composed of men (Americans) that were not afraid to think and express their thoughts. For my part, I ask no higher honor than to be classed as one of the Old Guard. I first saw the light in 1847 in the state of Wisconsin, and after drifting around until 23 years of age I came to Nebraska and started the first settlement in this part of the country, dug a hole in the ground and lived in it four years. Who came after? Why, the educated fellows, the farmers that farm the farmers, the influential fellows. Well, by having a robust constitution and a determined will I have withstood them all and expect to dedicate the remainder of my days to the interest of home-makers instead of home-breakers.

In looking over the list of subscribers to The Independent I am sorry to see so small a per cent from our own state. I consider it to be the duty of every populist to support our state paper and especially those whom the people have honored by placing them on our ticket or in office. When a man is elected to office, his duty does not stop there, but just commences, and when I try to get him to subscribe for our paper and fail, to say the least, it gives me that very tired feeling.

G. STEWART.

Geneva, Neb.

(It is a fact that the most earnest workers in the people's party have not been the officeholders. They are the men who never asked for office, men inspired only by the lofty ambition of making the world happier and better. It is to these humble and patriotic men scattered all over this state and other states, that makes the continued publication of The Independent possible. The editor often thinks of them and more often wishes that he could find words to convey to them his gratitude, and that of every well-wisher of mankind stored in their hearts for them.—Ed. Ind.)

### Well Pleased

Editor Independent: I am well pleased with The Independent and am showing it to our people. If I had the money to spare I would send it for

a number of subscribers. I would be glad if you would send me a few sample copies to distribute among the people. J. H. VANDERGRIFT, Branchville, Ala.

### A Glimmer

Lo, a glimmer, faint appearing,  
Like some bow of promise, cheering—  
Like the herald of a blessing,  
Soothes our grief, like love's caressing.

Courage, comrades, dawn is breaking;  
Light will come—mankind awaking—  
Roused from the stupor of the ages;  
Men will see as did the sages.

Ah, those years of social blindness!  
Darkness, then, mayhaps was kindness;  
Vexing horrors—woes distressing,  
Making blindness, mercy's blessing.

Truth, the light for souls illuming—  
Love, the flame for hate's consuming.  
Friendly forces—O, how cheering,  
Is the faith that they are nearing.

Haste the day, that gladsome season—  
Men shall see by light of reason.  
Phantoms born of darkness—blindness—  
Vanish in the light of kindness.

Long mankind have patient waited—  
Still, their woes are unabated.  
Greed and wrongs and wars are raging—  
Ignorance smites, without assuaging.

Light and love, alone, are needed—  
Vengeance never has succeeded.  
Wars and chains have had their inning—  
Love and light are just beginning.  
LYDIA PLATT RICHARDS,  
Pasadena, Cal.

### Will Die in the Harness

Editor Independent: Enclosed find a dollar for one year's subscription. I wish I could do more for the circulation of your paper, as I feel that it is doing a great deal of good. I am one of the Old Guard and have been in the movement ever since the days of Peter Cooper and expect to die in the harness. A. SHIPMAN, Osmond, Neb.

### Good Groceries Cheap

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"Don't you think Miss Millyuns has beautiful eyes?"  
"Yes," replied Mr. Hunter Rocks, "but they are not nearly so prominent as her nose."