

AMERICAN SOCIALISM

Former Populist Candidate for Governor of Missouri Suggests Measures and Means for an American Socialism

Hon. O. D. Jones, of Edina, Mo., who was the populist nominee for governor of that state in 1896, has since that time, as he believes, "progressed into socialism." He thinks he is not now a populist, but a full-fledged socialist, and to prove his faith by his works has written a book of 140 pages entitled "American Socialism." This, in paper covers, may be had of him at 25 cents a copy.

Primarily a reading of "American Socialism" will convince the initiated that if Mr. Jones is a "socialist," then practically all populists are also "socialists," but that those who profess to be simon pure, revolutionary socialists are not so in fact, but are something else. The Independent is inclined to think that Mr. Jones is a little mixed in his nomenclature; that he is not a socialist at all, but simply a radical populist, going a little farther than the platform demands of the people's party, but not differing more than millions of old party men differ from their platform professions of political faith.

For example, how does this sentence harmonize with "economic determinism" and the "materialistic conception of history": "Instead of this, it presents society as a great Ferris Wheel, filled with people impelled by a law and force over which they nor society have any control. . . . If this is true, if we are only a part of a revolving, developing mill; if we cannot retard, hasten or otherwise modify this motion, by the use of any teaching or sentiment we may advocate, why take any more trouble about it? Why pay more money for literature, lectures or propaganda work, if it is all the result of inexorable, physical fixed law, a material and moral fatalism? Why write a panegyric on the passing show?"

Yes, indeed, why? Any populist might with propriety ask such questions—but a socialist, never! The answer, Mr. Jones, is that the co-operative commonwealth must be born of revolution; it must be hatched out like a chick from the egg. Literature, lectures and propaganda work are to prepare the wage-worker for the "bornin'" so that the infant may not die.

"Socialism is not communism," says Mr. Jones. "While it aims to eliminate destructive competition, the state of industrial war, sought to be maintained by the exploiting class, as well as that of race, political and national war, it does not teach or propose the impractical idea of a national crib, hotel, table and laundry; one common stock, each citizen to hold a ticket of credit, to be punched for each meal, shave, bath or wash. . . . It is mortifying to see such a system held forth by certain teachers and papers as socialism; to hear it announced that government ought to own and operate a paper plant; it ought to own and farm all the land on a great scale, each person to get his share of the produce, somewhere, somehow, on his ticket, from somebody."

Dear Mr. Jones, you have certainly read to poor purpose your "Communist Manifesto," your "Economic Foundations of Society," your "Socialism, Utopian and Scientific," your "Capital," and the thousand and one other books which have some claims to be regarded as "authority" on the subject of socialism. Of course, no "scientific" socialist would contend that "government ought to own and operate a paper plant," or anything else—that would be what Liebknecht would call "state capitalism." Nothing is socialism so long as the wage system prevails; while the disinherited must sell his energy or labor power to the owner of the means of production and distribution—or some portion of them—be that owner a natural person, a corporation, or the "government."

You certainly understand that the ultimate aim of all socialism is to secure "the collective ownership of the means of production and distribution." The paper plant would be owned by the collectivity, whatever that may mean. Every laborer in the paper plant would be a part owner in it and have a voice in its management. No one would work for wages. Every laborer would be credited with the number of hours of labor performed. Every ton of paper would be priced as having required so many hours of labor to produce it. In every other productive industry the same system would prevail.

Each laborer would receive a certificate showing that he had performed so many hours of labor. Everything produced would be priced in terms of labor-hours. Having a certificate for ten hours, the possessor

could take it to any co-operative store and secure in exchange whatever products, he might choose, provided their production did not require to exceed ten hours of labor time.

Of course, the products so received in exchange for his labor certificate would be his private property, to consume as he chose. But there could be no private products "under socialism," because there would be no private means of production.

"The products of industries now classed as private may change relations to society," continues Mr. Jones, "and be classed as public and worthy of public operation. But society will never do these things until it has taken the first step in the natural order and owned and operated successfully those enterprises that are now classed as public utilities. It will not take the second step until it has taken the first." Good populist doctrine, Mr. Jones, but mighty poor socialism. Can't you grasp the fact that socialists demand the abolition of the entire wage system and that they refuse any "reforms" or palliatives? With them the co-operative commonwealth must be born. It can't be ushered in piecemeal.

Of course, "scientific" socialists might join you in laughing at Bellamy's "sublime nonsense;" they look for "tendencies" and seek to find the "historic mission" of the working class by a critical study of history from a materialistic standpoint; and they refuse to formulate any plans for distributing the wealth produced by the co-operative commonwealth, urging that the people of every epoch have always found a way to conduct their own affairs and that it would be idle to speculate upon the exact form that the distribution would assume.

Better come back to the people's party, Mr. Jones. Populists are not expecting to see a full-fledged co-operative commonwealth born in a day. They recognize a well-defined practical distinction between a railroad and a bakery—which socialists refuse to see, because both may employ wage-workers. Socialists denounce public ownership of railroads because the wage system would still be in force. You cannot successfully preach populist doctrine and call it "socialism." Come over where you belong.—D.

Mr. Griffin's Views

Editor Independent: When I replied to your inquiry about the Topeka Independent, I did not expect that my note would be published; but, since it has been, I feel moved to add a few conclusions at which I have arrived about the present political situation.

1. It is possible that the general republican sweep this fall may encourage the republican machine to substitute Hanna for Roosevelt as its presidential candidate. The republican machine and Wall street are both afraid of Roosevelt, and both would be entirely satisfied with Hanna. Nevertheless, I regard Roosevelt's nomination as almost certain. The mass of his party are so enthusiastic for him, and there are so many of us populists, socialists, and democrats that would vote for him as against his possible chief opponent that they may concede him the nomination, with the expectation of knifing him at the polls.

2. It is folly to expect any material reform from either the republican or democratic party. Both of them contain a large number of members who favor the bed rock populist principles of "equal opportunities for all." But both also contain a sufficiently strong plutocratic element with a machine element that is, in the main, thoroughly mercenary, that, no matter which of them is in power, but little progress can be made on reform lines. Each has a few prominent men—such as Roosevelt the republican, and Bryan the democrat—that cannot be entirely controlled, in their individual action, but neither is strong enough to control the actions of his party associates that may be elected with him.

3. Economic emancipation can be secured only through a party the mass of whose members are known to be so heartily in favor of "equal opportunities for all" that the holders of special privileges will instinctively regard it as inexorably against them and, therefore, keep out of it. That is to be determined more by its personnel than by its platform. The republican platform was never extreme on the slavery question. It was generally behind rather than ahead of public sentiment; but the slaveholders knew, from the first, that it was the deadly enemy of their cause. In like manner, the economic revolutionary party of the future will not need a radical platform and, indeed,



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would do better to adopt a very moderate one, provided, it makes it evident that it intends to go forward, as fast as it may be safe to do so, until "equal opportunities" shall have been secured to all.

4. I do not look for the formation of such an organization until the next panic comes. Until then, our chief work should be educational. A party organized too soon never triumphs. Let us keep on sowing seed and, when the proper time comes, the harvest will be ready for the reapers. When the great break-up comes I believe there will be many more ex-republicans in it than ex-democrats.

5. For reasons that I will not take space to give, I regard the democratic party—as a party—as even worse than the republican. It is composed more largely of the unprogressive element. Unless Roosevelt should be defeated for the republican nomination, Grover Cleveland is likely to be the democratic nominee—and I regard him as the strongest man they can nominate. The reasons for this conviction I will also omit—but, if you desire, will give them hereafter. I may, of course, be mistaken in this, but I hope not, because, while Cleveland is the strongest candidate the democrats can nominate, his nomination would probably lead to the abandonment of that party by a large part of those of its members that are populistically inclined.

6. While I strongly sympathize with socialism—as I understand socialism—I regard the socialist party as, in its influence, a Himalayan obstacle in its road. The need of the times is more independents—people who will vote for the men in either party that are likely to make honest efforts to do something—as Pingree did and Johnson does—and refuse to vote when the contest is merely between the ins and the outs.

7. The republican party is not nearly so strong as it appears to be. Its victories are largely due to opposition to the democratic party rather than to approval of its own subserviency. Scores, if not hundreds of thousands of people who wish to see very radical reforms adopted vote for republicans solely because they imagine that (no matter what its platform might be) democratic ascendancy would be like jumping from the fryingpan into the fire.

ALBERT GRIFFIN.
Topeka, Kas.

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