

A Word About the "Independent" (December 8, 1900)

A great many men and women who call themselves socialists do not affiliate with the national party. They hold aloof while the struggle is progressing and the party is evolving. They watch the struggle instead of being in it, with the result that the struggle is prolonged and the development of the party delayed. These "independents" may understand socialism, but whatever they may conceive themselves to be, they are not socialists.

The real struggle of socialism is to establish the cooperative commonwealth. Once the party is perfected, the rest follows as a natural sequence, and is comparatively easy.

Note the struggle in Germany, for example, for over a third of a century to build up the national party. Who shall tell of the patience, self-denial, anxiety, suffering, the strife and turmoil, the jealousy, suspicion, anger and hate, the factional discord, friendships made and broken, the period of temporary harmony shattered by dissension and disruption entailed by the herculean task? But out of it all came the magnificent Social Democratic Party, the wonder and admiration of the socialist world. Such a party could only have been forged and tempered and molded and fashioned in the flame of passion, the lightning of treachery, the tempest of hate, the sunshine of hope, the tide of economic necessity, the torrent of determination. This is evolution. Did the Titans who were its instruments sit on the fence and "wait" until the party was "made" and presented to them on a silver platter? No, they plunged into the struggle and "made" the party. They did not wait for it to "be made."

Suppose Liebknecht had been one of the "waiters" who are so numerous in this country. Would he have become the social colossus of his day? Would his funeral procession have shaken all Europe? Would the millions of the earth build monuments of flowers, watered by their tears, where the old warrior sleeps? No! If Liebknecht had been an "independent," if he had spent his time on the fence instead of in the fray, if remembered at all it would be as a time-server and a coward, of whom there has been an overproduction ever since man began his tramp from savagery to civilization.

Marx, Engels, and Lassalle were not “independent” factors in the social struggle. They shared in all the trials and privations incident to, and inseparable from, the building of a great political movement, and the world will forever remember them with gratitude and love.

Those who become members of clubs and leagues and those who are connected with “independent” and “unattached” bodies for fear that their sensitive organisms may be shocked in the clash of the party struggle, may become socialists, but they are not such in their present capacity.

Only those are socialists who are in the national and international party; and if the national party has not yet fully developed, only those have correct conception of socialist duties who are in and of the struggle, however fierce, of which the party is born, and from which it derives its strength and power.

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