

Vigorous War on the Socialist Press Forthcoming (June 5, 1908)

Washington, DC, June 5 [1908].

The active warfare against the socialist press by the capitalist authorities is to begin July 1. On that day the amendment to the postal law (somewhat shorn of its teeth, as reported last week) takes effect, and it is believed here that strenuous efforts will be made to deny the stronger of the socialist papers the mails, or so handicap with restrictions as to practically prohibit their publication. All this is done under the pretense of combating the abuse of a free press and suppressing anarchists.

When the Penrose bill in the Senate was exposed by the *Appeal*, a storm of indignation swept the country and the bill was hastily withdrawn. Now, however, the substance of the Penrose bill, which was aimed at the socialist press in general, and the *Appeal* in particular, has been surreptitiously put through Congress as a rider to the appropriation bill and is now a law, becoming effective July 1st. This is the smooth way capitalist congressmen have of slipping through special legislation offensive to the people; it is first introduced and "tried out" as a bill on its own merits and if it fails the substance of it is put in form of an amendment to the appropriation bill, and goes through slick as an eel without the people being wiser until the courts begin to tighten around the intended victims.

The Penrose bill, in spite of the storm of opposition, is now a law under the head of "appropriation," and is certainly in both object and method eminently appropriate capitalist legislation. To be properly classified it should be entitled the "Sneak Thief Act." The original law provided against the admission of indecent matter to the mails. The amendment just passed reads as follows: "And the term 'indecent' within the intendment of this section shall include matter of a character tending to incite arson, murder, or assassination."

The postmaster general being empowered to interpret the law and decide what is indecent, that functionary is now a dictator, and may upon his own motive choke off the mail privilege and suppress any publication. It may as well be understood that these capitalist hounds are on the trail of the socialists.

A committee clerk has given me the information that the socialist papers, especially the *Appeal*, were the theme of heated discussion in the committee room. The fact that the *Appeal* has been sent to each senator, congressman, judge, cabinet minister, and other federal officials during the session just closed has had its effect. Speaking to a congressman this morning, he raised the lid of his desk, and taking out a copy of the *Appeal* said: "They all hate the damned sheet, but they read it just the same."

One of the bitterest enemies of the *Appeal*, I am told, is Senator Aldrich,¹ the Standard Oil statesman, who declared with emphasis when the amendment was under discussion that some way must be found to put that "treasonable and anarchistic sheet" out of business.

Let me warn all socialist papers to keep a sharp lookout between now and July 1st, when the amendment takes effect. I have it upon good authority that a corps of secret operatives has been employed to scan the columns of all socialist papers, translate the foreign ones, and make due report of everything that may be construed as "indecent" and warrant the revocation of the second class privilege. In addition to this an army of secret inspectors is to be employed to examine each issue of each socialist paper for the purpose of discovering anything that can be construed as a violation of the amended postal law.

The friends of the *Appeal* here think the *Appeal* is in grave danger, and freely express their opinion that it will be crushed in the midst of the presidential campaign. The amendment, it will be noted, was made to take effect about the time the campaign opens, allowing a few weeks for the government detectives and spotters to furnish the evidence upon which to base the intended action.

There is a conspiracy to destroy the socialist press at a time when it is most needed. The postmaster general now has the absolute power and it is only a question as to whether, when the time comes, he will dare to exercise it. My idea is to keep within the law as in the past, defy the conspirators, and if they attack the socialist press, fight to the last ditch.

¹ Nelson W. Aldrich (1841-1915) was a Republican politician from Rhode Island. First elected to the US Senate in 1881, Aldrich would serve continuously in that body for three decades, gaining considerable decision-making authority over time.