
To All Sections and Party Members:

June 6, 1899, Letter of the National Executive Committee, SLP, to the Membership of the Socialist Labor Party Calling for a Vote.

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I.

As to the Nature and Object of the Socialistic Cooperative Publishing Association.

In the address of the National Executive Committee, entitled "The Situation in New York," published in *The People* of May 1, a brief statement has already been made of the circumstances under which the said Association was founded. But a few additional words in reference to this matter may here serve the purpose of greater precision or clearness. At that time the Socialists of Germany, in order to save their Party and its various organizations from the destructive aims of Bismarckian legislation, had established a "trustee" system (*Vertrauens männer-System*), which consisted in the appointment of certain men, enjoying the full confidence of the Party, to do in their own individual names certain things that the Party itself could not legally do in its collective capacity. As a matter of fact these trustees did nothing more than faithfully carry out the instructions of the Party, to which they owed at every step a strict account of their actions and an absolute compliance with its decisions. The very same method of dealing with legal impediments naturally suggested itself to the German Socialists of New York when, having resolved to publish a newspaper in the German language, they not only formed the Socialistic Cooperative Publishing Association for this primary and immediate purpose, but further extended its declared object to the publication of Socialist papers and literature in other languages. As obviously appears from all the well known facts of that time, taken in close connection with the very words of the constitution of the Association, its members were in their own view of themselves, as well as in the estimation of all the other Party members, the mere trustees (*Vertrauens männer*) of the Party, especially appointed to create and develop a Party press, subject at all times to Party control, regardless of any property rights which the capitalistic law of the State vested in them and which, by the superior law of Socialist ethics, they were bound to never enforce, claim, or even mention. It was, indeed, preposterous to conceive that the Party, jealous as it was of its independence, quick to resent the merest appear-

ance of dictation, and suspicious of any scheme savoring of capitalistic methods, would have not only countenanced but induced and promoted in its midst the formation of a private concern for the avowed object of placing in the hands of a comparatively few of its members the entire possession and absolute control of its own mightiest weapon — the Party press.

II.

As to the *Workmen's Advocate*.

Not only, then, was the Socialistic Cooperative Publishing Association built up by the Party as a special Party agency for a special Party purpose, but care was taken to make no premature demands upon it that might retard its growth and consequently impair its future efficiency in the contemplated work of establishing at the proper time an English daily. The sections "agitated" for the *Volkszeitung*; the Socialist unions advertised in its columns; subscriptions were opened to cover its deficits, pay its debts, or increase its means; entertainments were given for its benefit, numbers of which yielded large sums of money, etc., etc. Yet the Party, which in the meantime was painfully gaining adherents among the English-speaking workingmen, and which imperatively needed an English organ, undertook to publish a small weekly with its own scanty resources, thereby assuming an inevitable burden, which it might have rightfully imposed upon the Association.

This burden was for a long time heavy. In the end it was somewhat reduced by a subscription list which contained valuable elements of agitation for a more effective organ. But as the deficit was still too great for the Party to bear without crippling its other necessary and expanding modes of propaganda, the Party finally accepted the proposition made by the Association itself to take hold of the *Workmen's Advocate*, enlarge its size, and otherwise do what was mechanically and administratively required to successfully develop the paper under its new name, *The People*. Hence the agreement of March 1891, quoted in the above letter from the board of directors to the NEC.

Observe that success at a comparatively small cost was then no longer doubtful, although largely depending, of course, upon editorial ability. The Party had changed its tactics in 1889. Its vote was confined in 1888 to the city of New York, where it had reached in that year the small figure of about 2,000; whereas in 1890 it extended to the whole state, reaching to a total of 13,000, half of which was cast in the cities of New York and Brooklyn.

Moreover, other states, encouraged by this marked progress, were then preparing to enter the field, while the organization of sections in various parts of the country showed not only increased activity, but a steady accession of English-speaking workingmen. In the light of these facts the slur intended by the board of directors in their reference to the "bankrupt" condition of the *Workmen's Advocate* might be termed ludicrous were it not so sadly characteristic of "bourgeois" notions, and "bourgeois" business. So long as the *Workmen's Advocate* was directly published by the SLP, it could no more than the SLP become bankrupt. True, the wealth of the SLP does not consist in accumulated capital; it consists in a treasure far more indestructible; a treasure which can only increase and never be lost; namely, the devotion of its members and their readiness for any possible sacrifice. And it was from that treasure that the Socialistic Cooperative Publishing Association in the past twenty years derived all its means of existence and all that it now claims to "legally" possess.

III.

As to the Accounts of *The People*.

In stating that "from the date of the agreement until this date, our Association has paid deficits of *The People* amounting to over \$5,000, and our right to pay those deficits was never questioned," the board of directors is grossly and unpardonably incorrect. The account of *The People* at the end of the first two years showed a deficit of \$3,500, which the Association carried to the debit of its loss and profit account. But from that day to the time when the subscription price was cut down to fifty cents, the account of *The People* showed a balance of about \$900 to its credit. The reduction of price was made on condition that the subscribers to the Daily People's Major Fund agreed to cover any deficit which the said reduction might entail, and on this account the Daily People Committee paid to the Association the sum of \$1,000. The charges carried to the debit of *The People* for various items have been increased, partly legitimately and partly without necessity. On the other hand, *The People* was never credited with any portion of the large sums accruing to the Association from entertainments, etc., given during the last eight years for the benefit of the Party press.

IV.

As to the Agreement Between the SLP and the SCPA.

This document, as above published, speaks for itself. It is clearly stipulated therein that the NEC of the SLP shall not occupy in any one issue of *The People* or *Vorwaerts* more than one page for its own official matter (such, for instance, as the present call); the evident object of this restrictive clause being to preserve the "newspaper" character of the Party organs for the purpose of general circulation among people who are not Party members. But it is not less clearly stipulated that the SLP, through its chief editors elected in the manner therein provided for with the utmost precision, shall have the entire editorial control of the two papers, since the editors themselves are entirely subject to the control of the SLP alone.

The express condition, that in the case of a disagreement between the board of directors of the Association and the National Executive Committee concerning the selection of the chief editor of *The People* or *Vorwaerts* — he shall be elected by a general vote of the Party — settles this question beyond the possibility of dispute. It establishes on the one hand the supreme and undivided command of the Party over the contents of its organs from the first to the last line of their every issue; and on the other hand it places the Association in its correct position, which it fully determines: the position of a mechanical and clerical agency of the Party for the publication of Party papers, without any editorial rights whatsoever.

This position the Party had neglected to emphasize when the *Volkszeitung* was founded. It should then have likewise reserved to itself the election of the chief editor of that paper. But without entering into a lengthy consideration of this unfortunate omission and its consequences, let it be stated here that the party was clearer-sighted in 1891 than in 1878. Its experience had already taught it that the party as a whole was a safer guardian of its own principles and a more reliable manager of its own affairs than a limited body of Socialists, ever so "good," so "wise," and so "trustworthy," for the reason that the individuals originally composing such a body are not eternal, that their successors may not be so perfect, and that some even of the original best are liable to change for the worse, whereas the SLP is by its very nature an unchangeable and true body, ever young, ever self-purifying, ever growing in knowledge and strength.

In 1891, the Party had already seen some of the members of the Association turn anarchists, while some others had become middle-class men and a greater number were unconsciously, perhaps, but very obviously evolving into

pure and simplers. It therefore, by written agreement, made as secure and complete as it could thus be made, its editorial control of its own organs. Yet, as it now seems, all in vain. A paper chain cannot bind a body which the Socialist spirit has fled and the "bourgeois" spirit of property invaded. Hear the board of directors: "Our Association has always been and now is a sole owner of both *The People* and *Vorwaerts* and everything connected with them, including the mailing list as well as the right of issuing the said organs in any form it may desire, and with or without a supplement, as it may think best." The only "right" which they concede to the SLP outside of a limited space for the publication of its official matter, is the inalienable duty of lengthening the mailing list and otherwise using all its collective strength to pour money into the coffers of the Association, to the end that this mighty property power may the more effectively oppose the tactics and principles of the SLP in its own organs, as the said power in its supreme wisdom "may think best." And again: "We authorized and ordered the use of the mailing list of *The People* and the issue of the supplement to the *Vorwaerts*, and shall do so again and as often as occasion requires until your body comes to a better comprehension of the duties of the trust placed in its hands by the Party."

When was greater insolence the accompaniment of bolder assumption?

V.

Conclusion.

To sum up. The comrades throughout the country are now fully informed as to the circumstances which made it imperative upon *The People* to notice the growing hostility of the *Volkszeitung* to the Party principles and Party tactics. When the board of directors of the Association called upon the NEC with a "reply" which they requested the Committee to publish in *The People*, their attention was called in detail and at length to the various misstatements which it contained. They were told that if their real object was to put an end to the dispute, they should so amend their "reply" as to make their statements agree with the facts and this Committee would then publish it; but that its publication in its then submitted form, by necessitating a rejoinder in correction, would lead to further controversy. To this they made the strange answer that they had "no time" to reconsider any of their statements and that they wanted their "reply" to appear, such as it was, in the May Day edition of *The People*; whereupon the NEC declined

to comply with their request and decided to lay the whole matter before the Party and its friends in a comprehensive address, entitled "The Situation in New York," together with an "Appendix" containing the plain facts and proofs thereof in their consecutive order. This address, published in *The People* of May 1, covered historic ground of a most instructive sort. It showed in the light of past developments and present tendencies the necessity and soundness of the present Party tactics, and "with a friendly feeling publicly called upon the Socialistic Cooperative Publishing Association to disown the hostility of its present editors and to prove its loyalty by enforcing the constitution." But all to no purpose. Deaf to reason, impervious to appeals, and heedless of warnings, the Association rushed blindly on. Its directors made a *coup d'état*. They first issued their "Monthly English Edition of the *Vorwaerts*." Finally they "claimed the earth." Manifestly, the only course left to your National Executive Committee is to call for a general vote of the Party upon the question herewith submitted, namely:

"Shall the Party sever all connections between it and the Socialistic Cooperative Publishing Association; continue, through its National Executive Committee, the publication of its organs, *The People* and *Vorwaerts*, and demand from the said Association the unconditional surrender of all property belonging to the said organs, including their respective mailing lists and the amount of subscriptions paid in advance?"

Therefore the sections of the Party are hereby called upon to take a vote on the above question; to report the vote cast, giving the exact number for and against, and send returns to the National Secretary, Henry Kuhn, 184 William Street, New York City, not later than August 1, 1899, on which date the vote shall close.

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

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