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# Rebuilding the Socialist Party

by James Oneal

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One striking fact regarding working class organizations since the end of the World War is that all of them, conservative and radical, have suffered a heavy loss in membership. That final refuge of Communism in this country, the Workers Party, reports to Berlin that of something like 20,000 members, only 1,500 are English-speaking. There are about one-half the number of organized Communists today as compared with 1919.

The reports of the membership of the American Federation of Labor show heavy losses in membership since 1920. This is the conservative section of the labor movement. The membership of the AF of L reached its highest peak in 1920. It had, in round numbers, 4,050,000 members. At the Portland convention it reports 2,926,000 members. The heavy loss is evident.

The Socialist Party also lost members. Government and "patriotic" persecution destroyed many branches. Communism destroyed many more. Now we have reached the period of party building. Comrade Debs is giving devoted service in this work. We are recovering but the recovery will not be rapid. It is well that it should not be. We should build on a solid and enduring basis and avoid the mistakes of the past.

We want no more near-radicals, sentimental liberals, or liberal sentimentalists. We want no more Reggies of Greenwich Village, nor more "sweet souls" who turn sour in a great crisis, no more faddists seeking to attach their bizarre creeds to the movement.

We want a party of the workers and those

who will serve the workers. We must avoid the lunatic fringe that becomes intoxicated with romantic rambles in secret caverns. We want an end of the professional party saver who nurses a grouch because the party does not accept his heaven-inspired ideas. The insufferable gent who bores us with views on "revolutionary tactics" can be of no service to us. We want a Socialist party, not a dish of hash, a party that will be proud of its record in not surrendering to the imperialists and that suffered martyrdom because of its principles.

Here let me call the attention of our party builders to the fact that the Independent Labour party of Great Britain some two years ago faced the same problems that the Socialist Party faces today. There was a loss of membership and general lack of interest. Party veterans became apprehensive of the future. It was not promising. A conference was held and it was decided to carry on an organized drive to restore the lost vigor of the party.

Space does not permit a presentation of the plans worked out by the ILP, but those who have had the pleasure of reading the report of the annual conference held in London last April will be impressed by the remarkable results accomplished by this organized drive.

Today the ILP is the dominating influence in the British Labour Party. It provided 55 of the Labour Party candidates, of which 32 were elected to Parliament. J. Ramsay MacDonald of the ILP is the parliamentary leader of the Labour Party in the House of Commons. The Chairman of the Labour Party is generally picked from the mem-

bership of the ILP.

There were 9,000 lapsed party members. A drive was made from the head office to get them to return. With the cooperation of the branches a large number were reinstated. A wonderful publicity campaign was carried on and the party organ was improved. All this involved a heavy financial outlay. The circulation of the party organ was doubled, new members were obtained, and scores of leaflets and booklets were printed.

The results have been the most gratifying in the party's history. In the election of 1918 the average vote received by each candidate for Parliament was 6,500. In the last election the average had increased to 12,199 for each candidate. From December [1922] to April [1923], a period of 5 months, the ILP added 84 new branches to the party. Old branches increased their membership. Party members were never so active as in this period of reorganization. The ILP has gained a prestige and distinction in all parts of Great Britain because of its magnificent work of publicity, education, an organization.

What the ILP has done the Socialist Party can do. The tragic history of the period since 1917

has vindicated our position regarding the World War. We have nothing to be ashamed of and everything to be proud of. Our record is clean. We can proudly boast of it. Its mere recital to intelligent men and women commands respect.

We have this tremendous moral prestige upon which to build. It is our greatest asset. It should fire our veterans and our youth with enthusiasm for party building. It should enlist the devoted service of every party member in carrying out to the letter the campaign planned by the National Office of the party.

Is there a former member whose membership has lapsed? See him. Get him back. A great political struggle is approaching next year. It brings still greater opportunities. Prepare for them. Enlist under the red banner, the proud banner which we refused to lower when hate and vengeance and ignorance pursued us in our hour of trial.

A bigger, a more powerful, and a more fruitful Socialist Party is in the process of building today. Do your tasks, comrades, and build a great organization for the great contest of 1924.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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