
What Happened in St. Louis: Socialist Comments on Berger Defense: Sees a New World Republic Rising

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Now that after 3 weeks of silence on the subject Victor L. Berger has seen fit in an editorial in the *Milwaukee Leader* to recognize the fact that something happened at St. Louis [April 7-14, 1917] and has been happening since which calls for some defense on his part, it is proper for me to answer his references to these matters at least so far as they concern my part in them.

Mr. Berger accuse me of several things, such as “changing front on the war question,” a “turn-about” for which he says he can see no reason; that I have not gone to the County Central Committee with any grievances; that I have gone to the capitalist press; and then intimating that this is paralleled only by the work of the “agents provocateur” in the Russian revolutionist circles.

No Secrets of Origin.

As to the last part, there are no secrets about my origins, my coming into the Socialist Party, my activities and my attitude in the party and its work, and in this later development. Mr. Berger will do well to withdraw any such charge. It savors of an attitude of mind not at all agreeable to American conditions, and does not fit my case, whatever may be said of others whom I know.

I was frankly opposed to war on general principles — to all war — until recently. In this I was in agreement with Mr. Berger during the time he

was circulating Mr. [William Jennings] Bryant’s peace program. For a while I thought myself a pacifist; but I found that to be an “impossibilist” attitude, however ideally correct, and I am constructive in the bent of my mind.

Then several things happened. First, the announcement of the savage ruthlessness of the German U-boat campaign. That presented to my mind the possible results for civilization if some nation should happen to have the qualities required to carry out such a program successfully, and I saw that our nation would inevitably be dragged into the world melee.

Then came the Russian revolution, the unseating of the Tsar, and the lining up of the newest republic with that of France and with the practical democracy of England against a union of autocracies.

No Longer Neutral.

Then war was declared by the United States and it became impossible as a practical proposition to maintain a neutral attitude.

Within a week thereafter the Socialist Convention at St. Louis met to consider questions relative to war and militarism. At that convention this declaration of war was branded as the “greatest dishonor ever forced upon any nation”; the Socialist party was lined up against any kind of even

“alleged defensive” wars; and then the party was pledged to “mass action” against the government in matters relating to the war, and the National Executive Committee was instructed to “initiate concerted action with all anti-war forces” to carry out this program.

And — war had already been declared!

In that convention I saw those whom Mr. Berger called “fanatics” following their pacifist doctrines to the logical limit. I hear the syndicalist group denouncing all government and declaring that they had no choice between Kaiser and President. And this was not so unexpected. But when Morris Hillquit and Victor L. Berger, tacitly renouncing their nationalist positions, joined hands with those other elements, gave up their constructive policies of many years, let the “fanatics” take the lead, and helped to bulldoze the convention into doing things which it could not be gotten ever to do again, I at least did not lose my sense of the meaning of English words. I warned members of the convention. I made such a fight as I was able to make.

No Chance For Referendum.

I secured the drafting of an alternative declaration and the signing of it by enough delegates to entitle it to be submitted to the party referendum.

Mr. Berger did not approach me on the subject during the convention or afterwards. He did not invite me to state my position in the *Milwaukee Leader*, then or afterwards. I had been informed by one in authority to make my statement, before the convention; that there would be no use of my giving any statement to the *Leader*, as “it would not be printed.”

Mr. Berger did express in my hearing his anticipation that the “fanatics would resist” when it came to carrying out the program of the convention. This decided any doubts I had as to my duty to the members of the Socialist Party, and espe-

cially those in Wisconsin and vicinity.

The St. Louis Convention was not intended by those who called it to be the rehearsal of a comic opera. It was evidently intended that the outcome of it should be “concerted action with other anti-war forces” along the lines of “mass action,” and it was expected, at least by Victor L. Berger, that “the fanatics would resist.”

What Was Dreamed Of?

We have had reports of what happened in Brazil. And we have reason to believe that something similar was at least dreamed of here. What part the Socialist Party was expected to play, if any, why the St. Louis Convention was called as it was, what the program of “concerted action” may have been, how far and where and when the “fanatics would resist” — well, perhaps these are among the things which Mr. Berger says are not secret. In which case he ought to be perfectly willing — much more willing than he has thus far shown himself — to discuss them frankly.

My purpose in going to the “capitalist press” was to sound a warning to all my comrades who could be reached that they were endangering themselves for a purpose which I believed to be foreign to the Socialist movement. This could not be accomplished by taking up the matter in the County Central Committee, where Mr. Berger and his paper would simply cry me down.

If the Socialist Party fulfills a need in the political life in this country, it will live.

If the present organization and policy of that party does not meet the conditions of political life in this country, it will fade away.

No mere act of one man, not even of Victor L. Berger, can determine the history of the Socialist Party. But if the Socialist Party shall show that it is not only un-American, but anti-American, its present organization will pass into the condition known as that of *innocuous desuetude*, and some other movement will interpret the truths of

Socialism for American political life.

New International Body.

Meanwhile, I see rising among the democratic nations, amid the whirlwind and crash of war, the framework of an international body of finance, industry, and commerce, which may furnish the absolutely necessary soil for the growth of the long dreamed of, much desired republic of the world. When, even for the purposes of war, the nations of the earth are forced to lay aside the old method of industry and trade for profit, and to save the very heart's blood of civilization must build a foundation of social production and distribution to fit the uses of mankind, I know that I am in the presence of something like that which Huxley described when he saw under the microscope the line forming in the protoplasm which indicated the evolution of the spinal column of the vertebrate.

It seems quite true that Mr. Berger and many others — why are so many of them of German blood? — see no significance in all these things. They can not even see the difference between a kaiserdom and a republic. Well, I see a difference, and seeing, would deem myself criminal indeed, with a treason to those forbears who helped to make this land in all its wars, to those of my tribe who are to follow me, and to the principles of Socialism, if I should permit my mind and hand to be neutral in the presence of such a combat.

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