
Should the American Workers Form a Political Party of their Own? A Debate.

Morris Hillquit (National Chairman, Socialist Party) — **Yes.**

Matthew Woll (Vice President, American Federation of Labor) — **No.**

B. Charney Vladeck (Manager, *Jewish Daily Forward*) — **Chairman.**

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Mr. B. C. Vladeck: Tonight we are to listen to a discussion of one of the most important questions facing the workers of this country today, the question whether it is in their interest to form a party of their own. Both gentlemen who are going to discuss this question are nationally known, and able to present the question as well as it can be presented. It is not going to be a debate in the accepted sense of the word. There will be no rebuttals. Each of the speakers will present his side and it will be up to you to decide in your own minds with whom you agree. The first speaker, who takes the position that it is not necessary for the American workers to create a party of their own will be the president of the Union Labor Life Insurance Company, and a well known and esteemed Vice President of the American Federation of Labor, Mr. Matthew Woll. (*Applause.*)

Mr. Woll: Mr. Chairman and friends:

As stated by the presiding officer it will be my purpose to address myself to the question why the American labor movement, as represented by the American federation of Labor, has thus far declined to associate itself with any efforts to form a distinctive Labor Party, and why, up to the present moment, it has declined to thus associate itself with or to participate in any such efforts.

It is not because the American labor movement is unfamiliar with distinctive labor parties; but, on the contrary, it is because of experiences had heretofore

with such labor parties that the American Federation of Labor, and the majority of its affiliated national and international unions, have thus far refused, and are still disinclined to associate themselves with a distinctive labor party.

I think it is well, therefore, that we should briefly review what has taken place along these lines in our political and economic life from the inception of trade unionism to understand the present day attitude of the American labor movement. If we go back to the early days of the trade union movement we find that efforts were even then made for the formation of distinctive labor parties. As far back as 1828 — just a little over 100 years ago — we find that when the carpenters went on a strike in Philadelphia for the lo-hour day they aroused the sympathies of other workers in that community and urged the formation of a labor party.

A labor party was formed. A distinctive program was adopted and some minor successes were obtained. The movement formed the mechanics' unions of that day.

The movement spread. It spread to the city of New York. It spread to Albany. It spread to Massachusetts and, as a matter of fact, it resulted in an attempt to form a nationwide political party. It embraced in its activities at least 15 states. For the moment it seemed a most effective political labor movement. It followed all the usual forms of political parties, organizing the workers by Wards and Counties and following other

accepted political practices. Its program and its platform called for the 10 hour day. It protested against the continuance of convict labor in competition with free labor. It urged restriction of child labor, free education, abolition of sweat shops, lotteries, and of capital punishment.

It survived for a period of five years, at the end of which time it disintegrated. In its process of disintegration it likewise destroyed all the trade unions. As a matter of fact the moment the trade unions converted themselves into a political party the economic organizations fell by the wayside so that within a period of five years there was no effective labor party nor was there an effective trade union organization.

The results, as I have indicated, were local in character, beneficial to be sure, but what followed was far more destructive to the wage earners of that time than the temporary benefits. It influenced legislation of the lo-hour day in some communities, and of course, it promoted popular education and it abolished imprisonment for debt. But it destroyed effective trade union organizations.

As a result, the workers were disillusioned with the result of a distinctive labor party, realizing the effect it was having upon their economic movement. New leaders arose, building up again the trade union movement for purely economic as distinguished from political endeavors. Central unions were established and the labor movement again started with new incentive. However, it did not proceed long in that direction, for in 1836 we find developing a second experiment with a distinct labor party. Before that movement assumed general dimensions we have a local political movement right here in New York State, a movement largely anti-alien in character. For a moment it gained considerable headway, at one time defeating Tammany Hall.

The movement spread to Pennsylvania. However, it never reached national proportions. And again, after a few years of existence it passed on. The struggle of the wage earners to build up an economic labor movement had once more been sidetracked.

Again new leaders came to the front who realized the danger of the economic labor movement drifting into political activities. They rebuilt the trade union organizations on their original foundations. Central organizations were formed and political action was

repudiated. The idea then sprang up that these local organizations ought to be banded together and organized into national trade union organizations, instead of retaining their purely local character. During that period great progress was made. But then came the Great Panic of 1837, which again left the field of labor activities to the reformers, the politicians, and the so-called intellectuals, with the leaders in trade union movements being swept aside by reason of the prevailing depressed economic and financial conditions. And so we go on during that period until we reach 1848,' when industrial prosperity again revived trade unionism and again a new leadership came to the front, disillusioned with all previous attempts to form distinctive labor political parties.

It was during that time that the national unions began to be created instead of local unions. These organizations grew by leaps and bounds. Their programs were confined entirely to economic as distinguished from political activities. But again, that effort was short-lived because it was about that time that the German revolution took place, and that as a result many of the revolutionary leaders of Germany migrated to America. These were mostly agrarians and a conflict arose between them and the industrial labor movement. Political labor parties were again formed and the American trade unions opposed their efforts to control the labor movement.

That struggle between political and economic activities went on until 1857, when the industrial panic again destroyed the economic movement of the wage earners and again witnessed the advocacy of labor political activities. That was followed by the Civil War, when the trade unions were practically wiped out of existence.

Thus we go on from 1856 to 1872, when again the effort is made to organize the wage earners in a large political movement, and we come to the formation of the National Labor Union, a purely political body, a distinctive labor party. But it was unable to accomplish anything and ultimately because of the great disappointment on the part of wage earners in all these political movements, they declined further to associate in political activities and sought to confine themselves entirely to economic questions. It was in 1873 that a new federation was organized on the part of the wage earners, called the Industrial Brotherhood,

and its preamble and formation were based upon these principles:

“The organization when consummated shall not, so far as it is in our power to prevent, ever deteriorate into a political party or become the tail of the kite of any political party or a refuge for played-out politicians, but shall to all intents and purposes remain a purely industrial association, having for its sole and only object the securing to the producer of his full share of all the producer’s benefits.”

The organizers of this movement included the moulders,, machinists, typographers, and several other national organizations. But around 1875 there began a revival of labor politics with the formation of the Workingmen’s Party and similar organizations.

During this period of labor political parties again the economic movement deteriorated and was all but wiped out until 1879, when prosperity again returned and there was laid the basis for the formation of the American Federation of Labor, proposing, first of all,

to organize the trade union organizations upon the British plan, placing ultimate control in the hands of national and international unions as distinguished from local unions, proposing to build up the labor movement along craft as well as industrial lines and to place the organizations upon a sound financial basis, in contrast with the practice heretofore of living from hand to mouth by assessments and voluntary contributions and last, but not least, to establish a form of benefit in order to give to the labor movement not only a degree of solidarity but likewise to assure it of a continued and uninterrupted existence.

When that movement was formed it emphatically declared its opposition to the formation of or association with any distinctive labor political party. However, it proclaimed the necessity for legislation and political action without affiliation with, or adherence to, any one political party, labor or otherwise.

Thus, then, was formed the basis of the policies which carried through the American Federation of Labor from its formative period, until the present time.

In the panic of 1893, the first one to strike the labor movement since its formation on the basis urged by the American Federation of Labor, the trade unions survived the crisis, indicating clearly that the labor movement had been given permanency, solidarity and perpetuity, such as could only be attained by welding

its forces upon economic as distinguished from political grounds or political affiliations.

The American labor movement has not been free from this question of political activities, from a party political standpoint, since the formation of the American Federation of Labor, for it was in 1890 that the Socialist Labor Party tried to be admitted into the councils of the American Federation of Labor. And there, the first real test was had of the willingness of the American labor movement, to associate itself or to admit into its councils distinctive political labor parties.

Again in 1920, when the Farmer-Labor Party was formed, an effort was made to interest the American labor movement in that distinctive political labor party. True, a number of our state federations, a number of our local unions, identified themselves with that movement. But the attraction was comparatively small, and as you well know, the Farmer-Labor Party was short-lived.

Then, let us go back to more recent history. Let us go back to 1924, when both the Socialist Party and the American Federation of Labor joined in giving support to the so-called Progressive or Third distinctive political party, not distinctively labor in name, but one which the Socialist Party believed, and which quite a few in the trade union movement believed, would ultimately turn into a distinctive labor party. While we all joined in that campaign, I need not record to you the result of the efforts made. Neither is it my purpose to indicate to you the results obtained by the Socialist Party in seeking to organize the wage earners on the political field and thus carry on activities which labor believes can best and more efficiently be carried on in political and economic fields, through the non-partisan political policy and through economic endeavors on the part of the wage earners in their trade unions. Suffice it to point to the campaign of 1928, when that estimable leader of the Socialist Party ran for president. What was the result of that campaign? How well did the wage earners respond to that call? This is best evidenced by the record of the votes had. I shall not refer to it because it is well known to you.

Thus it is clearly evidenced that the American wage earners, particularly the organized wage earners, as represented by the American Federation of Labor, are not without experience, are not without precedent

and example as to the dangers involved in turning their activities to distinctive labor political actions, as distinguished from the economic purposes and ideals which have guided the American labor movement for these past 5 years.

.Now, there is a reason for the failure of these various attempts to organize the wage-earning class upon purely political grounds.

While the origin of labor movements in all industrial societies may be said to be alike; while all the promptings and urgings and the environment and conditions may be akin in all of the different nations, making for the formation of the wage earners' movement in one form or another, still the conditions under which the American Labor Movement has been founded differ fundamentally and vitally from conditions in any other country.

First of all, the American movement has never had to contend with a landed nobility such as the peoples of other nations have been confronted with. Neither have we had to contend with high and strong clerical societies. As a matter of fact our nation was born as a result of an economic struggle, a question of taxation, a question of trade, and so the whole formation of our national existence is not founded upon class distinction and class feeling, but rather upon trade and economic situations, in which the mechanics, the artisans, as well as every other citizen, were equally concerned, equally interested. Thus our nation was started upon a basis of common understanding rather than what prevailed in practically every other nation, to a smaller or larger degree, a class consciousness.

Secondly, the American labor movement is built upon a structure similar to our national government. And the very political structure of our nation makes it rather difficult, if not impossible, for the time being at least, to form distinctive, political parties, as a basis for the labor movement to continue as an effective economic force in our industrial existence.

First of all we embrace a continent. We embrace two nations, the Dominion of Canada as well as the United States, each of which is founded upon distinctive, separate, if not opposing theories of government. Canada is founded on the principle that within the State resides all power and that the individual has only such powers as are delegated to him by the State, while in the United States the underlying political philoso-

phy is that the sovereign power rests in the people, and that the governments, State as well as National, have only such powers as the people have delegated to the government. Brother Hillquit can well understand the distinction. Being a distinguished member of the Bar and legal profession he knows well the limitations imposed by the different philosophies of government.

In addition to that we have in the United States not only a different philosophy and theory underlying our national existence, but we have 48 distinct sovereign states, supplemented by our national government. And then, as a check upon governments themselves this division of governmental authority into the legislative, the executive, and the judicial branches, each restricted to its own sphere of government activity and so checked that no one power of government may ultimately gain full control of the authority of government.

Hence, we are confronted with a most complex — indeed a most difficult political situation — one which labor has not been unmindful of, which labor today even must meet in its non-partisan political program, and its endeavors to secure legislation for the amelioration of conditions of toil and for the improvement of conditions of life. For we find that even though we may be successful after years of agitation, and of concerted effort, in securing certain forms of social legislation, when the true test comes as to whether such legislation is within the legislative powers of our state or national governments, our judicial branch may declare such legislation contrary to constitutional provisions, and therefore null and void. And, that, of course, makes for difficulties in the furthering of legislation intended to benefit the wage earning class.

However, as I stated, the American labor movement is not a non-political minded movement. On the contrary, it believes in the utilization of political power. It sees the need of the exercise of government authority in the affirmative sense for the improvement of conditions, not alone of the wage earners, but of their dependents as well, and of the citizenship in general. Thus, too, it realizes the necessity of political action in a negative form, that is, to prevent legislation that will curtail the power of labor or that will seek to lower the standard of life, or work, of the wage earning class. But, it holds that political activity, can only be effectually applied not by the formation of a dis-

tinctive labor party, but by organizing the political power of the wage earners on a non-partisan political basis and attempting to use that political power of the wage-earning class as a balance of power between the major political parties rather than playing into the hands of any one political party.

And, that there is justification for that philosophy, for that understanding, is well evidenced in the progress that labor has made, both in our State legislatures and in our national government.

But let me turn to another point before dealing with this question more fully. Labor feels that the formation of a distinctive labor party would be unwise for the wage-earners. Mind you, I don't intend to predict that as time and experience may go on, as circumstances and environment may change, that there may not come the ultimate necessity for a distinctive labor party, embracing other toilers besides wage earners. But for the time being and under the present circumstances and conditions we are not unaware of the great danger, of the great menace that a distinctive political movement would present to the economic organizations of the wage earners were they again to be diverted into that field of activity. Why?

First of all, a strong labor party cannot be built without a strong trade union movement, and history thus far has demonstrated that you cannot build up a strong trade union organization upon economic grounds, if simultaneously efforts are being diverted into the formation and into the maintenance and promoting of a distinctive labor party.

Secondly, the federal character of our government makes a labor political party difficult and expensive. Difficult for the reasons I have already referred to: under the dual form of organization of our government, the division of powers of government and the restrictions placed on each, we would require not only a distinctive labor party, but practically a labor party in every one of our 48 states in the Union.

And when we look to the character of our states and the population that governs the political power within each state we find that the industrial influence is comparatively small, but that the agriculturalist power is very great. Indeed, if you will look over the roster, over the majority of our state legislatures and the overwhelming number of our state legislators; you will find that they are controlled by the farming inter-

ests, by the agriculturalist class, as distinguished from the industrialist class. Even in this highly industrial state of New York we find the farming communities in the western and northern parts of the state most influential and powerful as against the industrial cities throughout the state.

When we go to Pennsylvania we find almost the like situation. When we go to Illinois we find practically only one industrial city, and the State dominated almost entirely and completely by the farming communities. That is more or less true of Ohio, of Indiana, and Michigan, and when we take all of our states as a whole, we find that the great power resides in the agriculturists as distinguished from the industrialists.

Realizing these factors as practical men we seek to organize the power of the wage-earners in the industrial cities, in the industrial communities, even though surrounded by the agricultural areas to a vast extent, and endeavor to improve their conditions of life and work by economic rather than by political action, and, as I hope to show, if time will permit me, with a greater degree of success than has been realized by the wage-earners of any other country.

As I have indicated the inevitable effect of venturing into distinctive labor parties on the part of labor unions has been the disintegration of the trade union organization. The power of labor, in all of such instances, has been dissipated, and I am very frank in saying that the political power of labor, as organized by the American Federation of Labor under its non-partisan political program is far greater in imagination than in actual results. It is because politicians in office really do not know at any particular time how well or unwell labor may respond to the dictum on the part of the American Federation of Labor, as to its influence on political power, that they throw their activity and vote in favor of labor. Whereas, if we were organized as a distinctive labor party our power and weakness could readily be known and those in office would have been elected, not by reason of support on the part of labor. As a matter of fact they would have been opposed by labor through a distinctive labor party, and would of course not be responsible to labor in any way or manner and hence not the same degree of progress would be realized as has been realized by labor.

Then too, as you well know, the American citi-

zenry as well as the membership of the American trade union movement is not made up of a homogeneous people. We have in our midst the peoples of all nations, of all races, of all religious or irreligious creeds, of all tongues, of all national prejudices, of all national feelings. Were we to attempt to organize upon any other basis, excepting the economic, it would be well nigh impossible to have these men and women of all these conflicting thoughts, feelings, prejudices, and ideas to join the labor movement. Indeed, we know that were we to attempt to inject distinctive labor political parties into our union organizations, from that moment on they would disintegrate and would be destroyed, and hence we are deeply concerned that nothing should intervene, nothing should take place that would weaken the economic foundation of our trade union organizations.

Again, of course, we know, too, the lack of interest on the part of Americans in general in political activities. Do you need citation of authorities? Then let us look to the actual vote cast in all of our elections, state as well as national.

Then, too, one difficulty we now experience is to find proper leadership. Industrial and commercial opportunities often times take this leadership away from our trade union movement.

We might count many effective leaders in the cause of trade unionism, who for one reason or another have been drafted, or who have voluntarily entered the field of business, or professions and thus the leadership in trade unionism has been weakened if not taken away.

If labor were to favor the formation and the undertaking of a distinctive labor party this would be but another avenue for taking away of leadership from the industrial field to venture forth on the political field. And in that conflict, experience has clearly demonstrated the result that would follow to organized labor.

And last, but not least, as I have tried to indicate, the American wage earner is not class-conscious and therefore does not feel the need of a distinctive, class-conscious political party. This is not alone the understanding reached by trade unionists after years of experience, but this is likewise the observation and the conclusion reached by those who have been born and bred in and who have made a study of the Social-

ist movement. In support of that, I hold in my hands here a statement by Abraham Cahan. It is published by *The New Leader*, and I don't mind saying that I read the Socialist literature whenever I can. (Laughter.)

In a statement on "American Socialism Reexamined" what does he advise us? In the beginning of his article speaking of the great Socialist movement of Europe, which has been made possible by the class-consciousness of the European working men, he says: "His American brother on the other hand is a stranger to that sort of feeling, and this is the main cause why our movement meets with comparatively little success in this country." And then he goes on to say, "European society has been divided into classes since the beginning of time. The case is strikingly different in the United States, where instances of poor farmers or mechanics achieving wealth and social position are so frequent as to be considered a most commonplace and natural occurrence." And again, "The American boy is brought up in an atmosphere of ambition and aspiration, and try as we Socialists would, we are powerless to upset this part of the popular psychology."

And then he goes on to say: "When we tell the English speaking workingman in America to go to the ballot box on election day not merely as an American citizen, but also, and mainly, as a member of the working class, our plea falls on deaf ears." And further: "In fact, the average American working man resents being told that on Election Day he ought to feel like an underdog."

And then again: "The language of class-feeling in which we address him is a foreign tongue to him." And then he refers to the 1924 campaign: "During the LaFollette presidential campaign, which our party supported, there was much talk about the chances of starting a Labor Party along the lines of the organization that bears that name in Great Britain."

"The LaFollette campaign was looked upon as a sort of connecting link between that campaign and our movement. We went so far as to declare the Labor Party as good as an accomplished fact."

And then further on — this point is of particular importance — "The political parties in the United States, where party psychology is utterly unlike what it is in Europe, where they are chiefly class organizations, something absolutely foreign to the nature of

political life under the stars and stripes.”

Here then you have, surely, a student of political action on the part of the wage-earning class, frankly admitting that distinctive workers' political action is impossible of accomplishment because a class-conscious feeling does not exist under the stars and stripes and it is impossible of attainment. He is not alone in that declaration. I have not attempted to find any quotation of my friend on the right, Mr. Hillquit, on this subject, but one by the name of Joseph A. Weil goes more extensively into this question of political psychology and class consciousness. I shall read but a few extracts of his statement:

“The Socialist Party in America is weak because we have been trying to build on a foundation that does not exist here. There is no class struggle in the United States.” (*Laughter.*)

This is not one of the trade unionists — this is one of your group of the Socialist Party speaking in *The New Leader* — “Class struggle presupposes class consciousness and class consciousness presupposes class feeling, class pride, and class solidarity, that is all lacking among the workers in this country. It does not come from listening to Socialist orators, but is acquired from centuries of suffering.”

Then he goes on to speak of the Socialist movement in America, almost interpreting that as a product of race consciousness rather than of political consciousness.

Now, these are the expressions not of those opposed either to the movement of Socialism or the formation of labor parties, but of those who are within its councils and who have made a study of why greater progress has not been made in this country by the Socialist movement, leaving the question of the formation of a distinctive labor political party alone.

But I am afraid my time is running fast. I must therefore confine myself to the achievement really had by labor under its non-partisan political program. And what have we accomplished? Have we nothing really worth pointing to as a result of our activities? I may present to you what labor has accomplished on the economic field and through its economic organizations, during the past 50 years. I question whether Brother Hillquit will challenge that which labor has done through economic organization, but let us confine ourselves to our political activity.

In 1928 we endorsed 22 candidates for the United States Senate. We elected 11 of them. I frankly admit that not in all instances have they proved true friends of Labor. But that was an achievement of Labor. And if it misjudged those it supported it is not a fault of the policy involved. The fault might have been in the selection of candidates; and I dare say that even had they been Socialists they might have faltered, because Socialists are known to have faltered and to have proven traitors to their cause.

In 1930 we endorsed 20 candidates for the United States Senate with 17 elected. In 1931, as you well know, we successfully opposed the appointment of Judge Parker to the United States Supreme Court purely upon the issue of the “yellow dog contract.”

In the matter of legislation, in the past 23 years through the influence of organized labor we succeeded in having Congress enact 231 laws favorable to Labor, which were prepared by Labor and in Labor's interest. And during that same period we defeated 115 proposed laws, which, if enacted, would have been distinctly detrimental to organized labor and wage earners in general. In the last session of Congress alone, 57 laws favorable to Labor were enacted. In 1931 the various State legislatures that met passed 489 laws distinctly favorable to Labor and which were prepared, introduced, drafted, and furthered by organized Labor.

Now, it is not my purpose to review the actual accomplishment in the political field of Labor under the non-partisan political program. Suffice it to say that the record is one that equals, aye, excels the progressive program of favorable legislation affecting conditions and terms of employment of the wage earning classes of any nation, without exception, where strong Labor political movements predominate and function.

Thus we feel that judged from an unbiased point of view, organized labor has no cause for regret, but has every reason to maintain its position as heretofore, the policy to organize politically, but not upon a partisan basis, but rather to use that political power as a balance between the predominating political parties and thus acquire actual and effective legislative results, at the same time avoiding the extreme danger, not based upon fiction, but founded upon experience, of dissipating the economic movement of the wage earners by its venture into a distinctive political labor under-

taking.

Mind you, that does not mean that organized labor is disinterested, or is opposed to those who may without the labor movement, attempt to formulate progressive or advanced political parties. It means simply this: that the trade union organization as formed, as financed, will not alter its position, either as to requiring as a condition of admission into our unions or as a condition of retention within the unions a peculiar political faith or affiliation on the part of any wage earner. Neither will it permit the contribution or the use of funds on the part of our economic organizations being diverted and converted for political party purposes.

And last, but not least, it will not permit trade union leaders to, at the same time, become aspirants to political office and to divert the attention of organized labor from its immediate problems, of life and living, to speculation as to ultimate philosophies of government and to economics. It is under that practise, that American Trade Unions have had their development. Though we rise and fall, we ever go onward and upward. While today the trade union movement is again in a condition similar to that caused by previous panics, whether industrial or financial, or due to a war condition; while trade union leaders are again forced to meet a severe test, I predict that the life of the trade union organization will be maintained, however long this depression may last, and out of it will rise a still stronger trade union organization, and that it will go on, based upon its economic conception as it has made its present ascendancy, And insofar as I am concerned I hope that it may never venture forth into labor political activities, for when that moment comes I fear its destruction will take place. If time would permit it, we might analyze the development of our trade union organization in the various trades here as well as elsewhere and review their existence, their life, their rise and their fall, and again in the main, you would find that whatever weaknesses there was in that movement is traceable to the attempt to divert their activities to the political field rather than building up a strong economic industrial organization founding its movement upon a basis that makes for continuity, solidarity, and a strength that may not be dissipated by taking any immediate position that may appeal to the electorate.

Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, American organized labor, while not opposing in principle labor parties, nevertheless, has found by experience, that if the wage earners are to gain, are to continue to prosper and to enlarge their opportunities, it can only be done by strong, effective, economic organizations, by using its political power, regardless of political affiliation, and that it will suffer defeat once it attempts to convert those activities into a distinctive labor political movement. (*Prolonged applause.*)

The chairman having introduced Mr. Morris Hillquit, the opposite side of the question was presented as follows:

Mr. Hillquit: Mr. Chairman, Mr. Woll, and friends:

I am sure I express the sentiment of the whole audience when I say that we are thankful to Mr. Woll for the interesting statement of his views on labor politics. Mr. Woll is a recognized spokesman of the American Federation of Labor and one of the ablest exponents of its policies. He speaks with authority, and his opinions are entitled to serious consideration.

Needless to say I utterly disagree with his conclusions (*Laughter*), as he will probably disagree with mine (*Laughter*), and the reason for our mutual disagreement lies in the fact that there is a fundamental difference between Mr. Woll and myself in our respective conceptions of the nature and object of the labor movement and the meaning and functions of politics.

Mr. Woll, it seems to me, treats labor unions as aggregations of persons who happen to earn their living by work and are organized for the protection of their labor standards, but who otherwise have the identical standing and interests in life as their fellow citizens. He considers politics as something rather important but by no means an organic function of the labor movement.

I, on the other hand, look upon organized labor as a movement of a distinct class, an economically dependent, exploited and oppressed class, consciously or unconsciously striving to change the whole unjust economic system of private capitalism and to secure to the workers full social justice. I consider the political struggle as essential to the success of labor's cause as its economic struggles.

The workers of America will be effective in their

struggles for justice and liberty only if they are organized economically in an all-embracing and powerful union and politically in a party of their own, a Socialist party or a labor party, which is the same thing. And here I should like to assure the distinguished speaker who preceded me that I have no desire to enter into a controversy with the American Federation of Labor on questions of principles or to claim a superiority of Socialist aims and ideals over those of the trade-union movement.

On the contrary, I maintain that the trade-union movement in its character, make-up and ultimate aims is inevitably Socialistic. The main difference between us Socialists and the average trade unionist is that we realize the ultimate identity of our aims while they do not as yet.

Let me try to prove that assertion. The main tenets of Socialism are, I take it, familiar to most of you. I am glad to find that they are also familiar to Mr. Woll, whose reading of *The New Leader*, I hope, is not confined to the occasional dissident articles of my good friend Abe Cahan. (*Laughter — Applause.*) The Socialist creed may be summed up as follows:

Our people are divided into different classes, classes not created by law but by economic position.

There is first the possessing or capitalist class. That class as a class does not live by work but by workless income in the shape of rent, profit or interest. It owns the land upon which we all must live with all the natural wealth under the surface and above it, the oil, coal, metals, minerals, forests, etc. It owns the means of transportation and communication, the railroads, steamships, telephones and telegraphs, and all the modern tools and instruments of work, the factories, mines, mills, machines and equipment.

Then there is the working class, a class of persons who by their labor create and augment the wealth of the rich but barely manage to sustain themselves alive. They cannot work without the use of the modern machinery of wealth production. They must sell their labor to the owners of this machinery.

The industries are operated for the private profits of the capitalists. Hence every capitalist concern seeks to retain the largest possible share of its income for its owners and stockholders and to pay as little as possible to the workers as wages.

The industries of the country are the personal

property of the capitalists and are conducted by them without responsibility or accountability to the people. When it pays them they keep "their" business going, when it does not pay them they stop operations and deprive millions of workers of their jobs and bread.

Between these two classes there is war. Now, Mr. Woll says that there is no such thing as class struggle in the United States and he cites some articles and letters in *The New Leader* in support of his contention. Had he said that there is no class consciousness among the American workers I could on the whole agree with him. But when he says there are no class struggles here, I must rejoin that there is a very decided and acute class struggle in the United States (*Prolonged applause*).

By "class struggle" I do not necessarily mean open and physical conflict, but a constant and acute antagonism of interests which mostly smolders under the surface and sometimes breaks out in violent hostilities, and Mr. Woll has participated in such class struggles probably as much as anybody.

This class struggle can only end with the end of economic classes and class divisions, and that is what Socialism seeks to accomplish.

The Socialist program frankly contemplates a complete and radical reorganization of our whole industrial system. Concretely we demand that all basic industries be taken out of private hands and be socialized, i.e., owned by the government, federal, state or local, as the case may be, and operated by appropriate public agencies for the benefit of the people. That implies planned production for use with the total elimination of private profit, unregulated competition, speculative operations, cyclical depressions, exploitation of labor, forced unemployment and class antagonisms.

The Socialists do not expect or desire a sudden, cataclysmic change. They hope for a gradual, though rapid, transformation. The process of such transformation must include a series of important preliminary economic, political and social reforms, such as a considerable rise of the wage level and reduction of the labor time, an effective system of social insurance for workers and the elimination of all legal restrictions upon the struggles of organized labor.

It is not likely that the owning and employing classes will voluntarily surrender their privilege of tax-

ing the toil of the workers. If the workers are to secure substantial improvements of their mode and standard of life and eventual freedom from exploitation and oppression they will have to force the concessions by dint of their own power.

That means a strong organization of the working class in the widest sense of the term, including the skilled and unskilled, the manual and mental, the workers on the farm as well as those in the factories, mines, mills, offices and on the roads.

It means an organization strong not only in numbers but also in conscious purpose, determination and solidarity. And it means an organization political as well as economic.

The immediately needed social and economic improvements in the general conditions of the workers and, still more so, their complete ultimate deliverance can only be effected by legislative enactment or other governmental measures. The two old parties now in control of the government in all its departments are managed and financed by the wealthy privileged classes and represent the interests of these classes. They are not likely to legislate their own class out of existence or even of economic privileges. (*Applause.*) The hope of the workers, therefore, lies in a political party of their own, challenging the power of the old capitalist parties and electing their own representatives to legislative and administrative bodies in numbers strong enough to control or at least influence their policies.

That is why the Socialist Party stands for independent working class political action; that is why it is a Socialist Party.

Having thus briefly defined the views and aims of the Socialist Party I shall now try to make good my earlier assertion that they are essentially identical with those of the labor unions, except so far yet unconsciously on the part of the unions.

A labor union within a given craft or industry functions primarily for the protection and improvement of the labor standards in that particular industry. Here we may perceive the first apparent difference from the Socialist Party, which considers the general rather than the special interests of the workers. But in the modern conditions of industrial interdependence the union soon perceives that it cannot stand alone. For the effective attainment of its objects it is bound to cooperate with other unions locally and nationally.

The American Federation of Labor, for instance, is concerned not so much with the separate problems of the different organized trades as with the general conditions of the workers, all American workers, the workers, begging Mr. Woll's pardon, as a class. (*Laughter.*)

Then it is generally assumed that the chief distinction between the economic organizations of labor and the Socialist Party is that the former confine their activities to the daily needs and immediate demands of the workers, while the latter emphasizes the ultimate goal of labor's complete emancipation. This distinction also is more apparent than real. As a matter of fact the trade-union movement is by necessity propelled towards the same ultimate end as Socialism.

It was not so long ago that the goal of the American labor movement was the eight-hour work day. That has now been generally attained. Did the movement rest satisfied with it? By no means. At present the battle cry is for a 5 day work week and since that has been realized in several industries voices are already heard demanding a 6 hour day in a 5 day week.

Some day this demand will be generally conceded. Will the labor movement accept it as final? Surely not as long as new labor-saving machinery again increases productivity.

Similarly organized labor has been steadily fighting for better wages. The struggle is always waged in terms of a specific increase at a given time. When the increase is obtained, will it satisfy the workers forever? Of course not. They will demand more and more and will never stop fighting until they have secured the full social equivalent of their labor and full economic justice.

A little more than twenty years ago I had the pleasure of meeting Samuel Gompers, probably the most forceful figure produced by the American labor movement, before the famous Commission on Industrial Relations appointed by President Wilson.

We had both been invited to state the objects and methods of the movements which we respectively represented and by a friendly arrangement between ourselves we cross-examined each other in an effort to bring out the points of contact or divergence between the trade-union movement and the Socialist movement.

I do not know what brother Gompers had in mind in cross-examining me. I had no hostile inten-

tions in cross-examining him. All I wanted to bring out was just this: That there is no essential difference between the ultimate aims of the Socialist and trade-unionists, except that we know what we are heading for, the trade unionists unfortunately not yet. (Laughter.) And I asked him these questions: "Mr. Gompers, what are your demands? What are the objects of your organization?" He said, "Among other things, shorter hours, better pay." I asked, "How much shorter? How much better?" He said, "Considerably." Again I asked: "Granted you have got it. Will you be demands? What are the objects of your organization?" He said, "More." "More what?" "Still shorter hours. Still better pay, and so on." "And when will you ever stop?" I asked him. And here I read from the record our colloquy on this particular point. I said, "Now, my question is, will this effort on the part of organized labor to improve its conditions and get more and more ever stop before the workers receive the full reward of their labor?" Mr. Gompers replied: "It won't stop at any particular point, whether it be that towards which you have just stated or anything else. The working people will never stop in their efforts to obtain a better life for themselves and for their wives and for their children and for humanity." My next question was: "Then the object of the organized worker is to obtain complete social justice for themselves and for their wives and for their children?" To which he answered, "It is the effort to obtain a better life. Every day." I tried to ask the next question, "Until such time—" and he interrupted me, "Not until any time. We go farther than you. You have an end. We have not." (Laughter — Applause.)

And then I asked Mr. Gompers, "Does that mean that the difference between you and the Socialist Party is that you go farther than the Socialists in its ultimate ends?" Well, he said that was not quite what he meant. But the only logical answer to be made was that both movements tend to the same end, an answer, I venture to say, that Mr. Woll would make, if he were questioned along these lines. The organized labor movement stands for certain definite, immediate improvements, but, nevertheless, it is definitely, logically propelled to the Socialist program of abolishing all privileges of the capitalist classes and to get full social justice for the workers.

And when Mr. Woll asserts that one essential difference, between us is that we are a class party, and

the American workers do not consider themselves as belonging to a class, I cannot take it without a grain of salt. For instance, is there a labor union worthy of its name that would admit an employer to its membership? No. Why not? Because the union is organized against him. It is organized to protect the interests of the workers against the interests of the employers. Is that class consciousness? (Laughter.) It seems to me it is, at least to a certain extent. I don't believe the American Federation of Labor would make common cause with the National Manufacturers' Association or with the National Chamber of Commerce. Why does it then support the same elements and interests when they appear in the disguise of political parties — Democratic or Republican? (Applause.)

Mr. Woll has made a few other interesting observations, which I will try to take up one by one.

He has summed up the history of previous attempts of the American workers to form labor parties, and their failures, and this is what we learned:

As far back as 1828 a labor party was formed. It died. It carried the economic organization with it. A few years later again, and another party was formed and again it disappeared. And every time a labor party died the economic organization died with it. Hence, Mr. Woll assumes that it was the demise of the labor party that caused the death of the economic organization.

Now, you know the opposite may also be true. (Laughter.) It may be the death of the economic organization that caused the premature demise of the labor party. You see how it works:

In 1828 there wasn't much of a labor movement. There could not be. We had no developed industries. We hardly had an industrial working class in the United States. There were sporadic attempts on the part of some isolated groups of workers to organize economically and politically and with the first wind they were blown away, both the political and the economic organizations. It is very difficult to determine which was the cause of the mortality. The fact probably is that neither caused the death of the other, but that both died of the common disease of anemia. (Laughter.)

Now, this went on pretty much to the middle of the last century. Mr. Woll knows as well as I that there was no organized labor movement worthy of the name in this country until practically after the Civil War.

And it wasn't because at a certain time, say in 1879, some very wise men invented a new form of labor organization, such as was expressed in the Constitution of the American Federation of Labor, that from that point on the movement thrived. Oh, no. It was because by that time the capitalist development had assumed such dimensions in the United States and the working class had become so numerous that trade unions became not only possible but necessary. And that is why, from that point on, the unions survived the various industrial depressions.

Then Mr. Woll comes to the last two attempts at labor politics. That is within our own memory. A Farmer-Labor Party was organized in 1920 and he says, "Some state federations and some local unions identified themselves with it. But the attraction was small," and it must be assumed that the American Federation of Labor discouraged it. And what do you think happened? The Farmer-Labor Party died, and you see where the American Federation of Labor would have been if it had not discouraged the movement. The answer is that if the American Federation of Labor had encouraged it, it would perhaps not have died at all. It might have been a great and powerful party today and of inestimable value to American labor. (*Applause.*)

The most recent instance of labor politics in America is the LaFollette campaign. Well, that touches me rather closely. (*Laughter.*) I took an active part in it. It seemed to me to be the first bona fide attempt on the part of a large body of American organized workers to create a party of their own. It was not primarily the American Federation of Labor that initiated that move. It was largely the Railroad Brotherhoods, with some organizations belonging to the American Federation of Labor, and when that movement developed, down to 1924, and the election came on, we were discussing the question whether a labor party should be formed or whether we should just run candidates for president and vice-president. We Socialists were all for a labor party, and so was also, I may say, a great majority of the convention that came together in Cleveland. But Senator LaFollette thought he would better run alone, and said so. That was the reason for the doom of the movement. Even then the LaFollette campaign might have laid the foundation of a great and powerful labor party in America. But the American Federation of Labor had not much changed its mind and

feelings on this subject. Its support came late and was lukewarm.

In the City of New York, for instance, the representatives of the American Federation of Labor, in our Central Trades and Labor Council, on the eve of the election, openly repudiated the candidate formally approved by the American Federation of Labor, and endorsed the Democratic Party. In spite of all that, about 5 million votes were recorded for Senator LaFollette.

If the American labor movement had sufficient vision to crystallize and organize all the elements behind that movement, we would undoubtedly be seriously contesting the presidential election in the coming Fall. So this historical review does not help Mr. Woll very much.

But there is another observation pertinent on this point: All these things have happened not in America alone. Attempts to build labor unions and political labor parties, and failures of such attempts in early days, have occurred in England, in France, in Germany and in all other advanced countries. In fact, the history of the labor movement is strewn with corpses of premature attempts. The workers of these countries went back and started again and again, and at last they succeeded. Today they have powerful political movements, and I haven't heard yet that these political parties are deterring them from their economic activities. On the contrary, the unanimous testimony is that the political struggles of the European workers help their economic activities rather than destroy them. (*Applause.*)

Because a thing has failed in the past we cannot conclude that it will fail forever. I remember that the American Federation of Labor made a very laudable effort to organize the steel workers. The effort failed. The attempt had to be given tip for the time being. I don't suppose Mr. Woll or the American Federation of Labor have given it up forever. I suppose they will return to the charge again and again until they succeed in organizing the unorganized workers in that industry and in other industries, and that applies in the same way to political organizations.

Finally, Mr. Woll asks, "Well, there is the Socialist Party? What has been your success?" and he was tactful enough not to read the figures of the Socialist returns in the last presidential election. I shall answer

him frankly and honestly. We have unfortunately so far achieved very little. If you ask me why I will say the answer is, "The American Federation of Labor." (*Prolonged applause.*)

The Socialist movement is a labor movement, a political labor movement. It cannot exist as anything else. It may have supporters from other classes of society, but its body and soul must be labor. The acceptance of the Socialist program in any country is the true measure of the political maturity of its workers. When the Socialist movement is weak in any country it simply indicates that the labor movement has not yet developed sufficient political consciousness to realize that it should support its own class in politics as well as in the economic field.

Then, Mr. Woll asserts that a labor party is impossible in America altogether, inherently and forever impossible. Why? Because the history of our country has been different from that of the countries of Europe. We have never had the feudal system, a class of landowning nobility, or a privileged class of the clergy. All we have had is what? We have had capitalists and workers.

Now the labor movement and Socialist movements in Europe did not develop in struggles against the feudal order, the landowning nobility or the church oligarchy. That was the earlier struggle of the middle classes culminating in the French Revolution. The struggle of the modern workers has always been against the industrial-capitalist class. And the industrial-capitalist class, I assure you, Mr. Woll, we also have in the United States. (*Applause.*)

Mr. Woll points out other obstacles in the path of apolitical labor movement in America. The American Federation of Labor, he says, includes also unions in Canada. The Canadian form of government is different from ours. How then can we divide the forces politically? Easy enough. Canada has a pretty lively labor party and the labor unions can support it. The United States labor unions could support a labor party in this country.

It is true, we have a complicated political structure. We have a federal government and forty-eight state governments. We have the division of governmental functions into legislative, executive and judicial, and we have a variety of tongues, races, creeds and prejudices to contend with. All that is true. But

how did it happen that we have a Republican Party and a Democratic Party in the United States? (*Applause.*) They are faced with the same difficulties, but they have adjusted themselves to these conditions. And I assure you that a labor party could adjust itself to the conditions just as easily as they. The fact that we have been able to organize national unions, a national federation of unions, in spite of the State lines, in spite of the differences in languages, races and traditions, indicates that the workers can be organized on a national scale in the United States as well.

Then there was another peculiar obstacle that Mr. Woll mentioned, and that is that our state legislatures are largely controlled by agricultural interests. Well, the agricultural element is not more predominant in the United States than it is in most advanced countries of the world. The agricultural element is declining constantly in favor of the industrial element.

If the workers were organized politically and selected their own representatives they could have a working class majority in the legislatures of all industrial states.

Take for instance the City of New York. It elects about half of the State legislators. And if you will walk from the Bowery up to the Bronx and across the river here to this Academy of Music, and count the number of farms you meet on your way it will not be very many. (*Laughter.*) The millions of New York workers neither vote for themselves nor for hostile farmers, but for Tammany Hall. (*Applause.*)

But this is not all. We Socialists do not see any necessary antagonism between the so-called agricultural interests and the industrial interests, from the point of view of the worker and the working farmer. Both have interests in common and could very well unite on proper progressive social legislation. (*Applause.*)

Mr. Woll also points with pride to the results of the "non-partisan" political policy of the American Federation of Labor. And he represents this policy in about this way. A public election comes around, and there stands organized labor with millions of votes behind it. What party do they stand for? They won't tell you. (*Laughter.*) Then the politician becomes anxious. "These fellows are hiding something from me," he thinks. "They can support me or knife me. I'd rather be careful and make concessions to them." And so they

make concessions. And that is the way labor gains all the time. (*Laughter.*)

Now, I am afraid that this description does not quite fit the actual facts as we know them. For instance, again to speak of home, in the City of New York, if we talk about the “non-partisan” policies of our Central Trades and Labor Council — everybody knows that it is a Tammany ally.

And then Mr. Woll says he is afraid that if the unions go into politics there will be a new lure for the union leaders in the shape of political office and patronage. I say that is precisely what is happening today and what would not and could not happen if we had a labor party. (*Applause.*)

Today, a number of labor leaders, in New York for instance, have been lured away into political activities ‘in the service of Tammany Hall. And when they are lured into Tammany Hall they are lost to the movement. (*Applause.*) Whereas any labor leader who would acquire political eminence in a labor party would not be lost to the movement, but on the contrary would become a stronger pillar for it than ever. (*Applause.*)

As to the achievements of this “non-partisan” policy, well, I suppose Mr. Woll did not have enough time to enumerate them. Still I had expected with all my scepticism a little more than just this: “Eleven candidates for United States Senate;- elected in 1928, out of the 22 endorsed by labor.” How were they elected? Was any of them elected as a representative of the American Federation of Labor or simply of labor? No. They were Republicans and Democrats and they were elected as Republicans and Democrats. And Mr. Woll says they did not stay put — at least not all of them. Why should we be surprised? These men owed their allegiance to their parties. The man who owes his nomination to the Republican Party would be dishonest if he betrayed the party on whose platform he ran. When the interests of labor clash with those of the Republican boss he is quite likely to topple over. And the same is, of course, true with respect to” those who were elected as Democrats.

Now, there have also been a few cases in the political labor movement where elected representatives have betrayed their party, but you can count them on the fingers of your hand and the very fact that they stand out today, universally known and notorious, shows how exceptional is the case. Why? Because just

as a Republican will ordinarily remain true to the Republican Party, because that is where his bread and butter lies — just as a Democrat will remain true to his Democratic Party, so will the public officer elected by the labor party as its representative remain true to the labor party and the labor movement. (*Applause.*)

And then we have the practical achievement of “non-partisan” labor politics in the sphere of legislative enactments. I am not here to belittle the achievements of organized labor — in any respect. I should like to see real achievement. But it seems to me when the American Federation of Labor sums up the results of its political non-partisan activities and compares them with those of the partisan political activities of labor in other countries it has nothing to be particularly proud about.

Here we have this situation: In the United States, the wealthiest country of the world, we have a tremendous, a ghastly number of unemployed, some ten millions or thereabouts, and here is our president and our government appropriating billions for all classes of suffering capitalists, the railroads, the banks and real estate interests (*Laughter.*) and so forth. And there comes the proposal to allot \$375 million — something we spent during the War almost every day — for the relief of these ten millions of workers practically starving. The American Federation of Labor, with a great and impressive parade of all presidents of its National Unions, comes to the government which they had supported in a “non-partisan” way so long and saying, “Give our workers just bread.” And they are turned down. Not a cent is voted for the relief of the workers by the United States Congress.

And there is pauperized Germany and struggling England, with their labor and Socialist parties. The unemployed workers there at least do not have to stand in bread lines and beg bread. They get regular governmental relief. (*Prolonged applause.*)

Talk about our legislative achievements here. Why, the United States is the only country in which labor unions are barely tolerated and in which their most essential activities are often outlawed. Do the workers of any other country suffer from judicial tyranny, judicial interference with labor disputes by the writ of injunction, as they do here? Do they have the “yellow dog contracts” in any other country? Oh, no! In the countries in which there are labor or Socialist

parties, the trade unions are not merely tolerated, but are given a definite place in the economic and political life of the nation.

They have an assured legal status and they have obtained legislative concessions of vital importance to the workers in the whole field of social insurance: old-age pensions, government support in sickness and disability and substantial relief of the jobless.

Compared with the other advanced countries of the world, labor legislation in the United States is woefully lagging.

I repeat I have no desire to criticize or reproach the American Federation of Labor, but are not its spokesmen a bit too conceited about the achievements of organized labor in this country?

Our trade-union movement which has been so carefully guarded against the contaminating influence of labor politics, barely represents 15 percent of the industrial workers. It lacks that spirit of idealism, that larger vision of working class struggles, which the workers in other countries, organized politically as well as economically, possess in such a high degree.

The sooner we follow the example of our brothers across the Atlantic, concentrating our efforts on the development of an all-embracing organization of workers, imbued with idealism and fighting as a unit on all fronts, political as well as economic, the better for all of us. (*Prolonged applause.*)

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