

too plain that the public is very generally ignorant of exactly what prison conditions are. People easily forget all about the penitentiaries, and even when they do not, it is easy to deceive by a superficial correctness that may hide terrible things. Means must be found to achieve two ends: to increase the public alertness, and to improve the prison system so that in more cases than now it will run well automatically.

To accomplish the first object, no less than a steady campaign of education will be required in many States; a body of citizens must be collected and organized which

shall be permanently interested in the maintenance of proper prison conditions. To achieve the second, reliance must be placed upon a more centralized control of penal institutions, as the best way of freeing them from the grip of politicians. One of the developments of the near future, we may hope, will be the powerful single State board in control of charitable and penal institutions, the members of which the inhabitants will expect to be as expert, able, and free from partisan influence as the members of the Public Service Commission. Such a board would appoint none but penal experts to Wardenships.

Why Idealists Quit the Socialist Party

THE chagrin of the Socialist organization in the United States over the precipitate decline of its vote is uncommonly keen. Immediately after the recent Presidential election over-enthusiastic Socialists jubilantly claimed 1,300,000 votes. Had their claim been borne out, there would have been a large increase over the 901,000 votes received in 1912. The sorry situation presently developed that, notwithstanding years of the most active propaganda, the Socialist vote fell much more than one-third of what it had been four years previously. The total vote of the Socialist party in 1916 was 590,166. Nominally, this is less than a one-third decrease from the 1912 vote. But when it is considered that the 1916 vote includes approximately 150,000 women's votes in new suffrage States, the actual diminution can be reckoned at more than one-third.

For other political parties to make explanations of losses is a customary aftermath of an election. Seasoned in the whirligig of politics, they expect reverses; their confident campaign assurances are a recognized part of preëlection tactics. But leaders of the Socialist party believed in the uninterrupted advance of their voting power. Successive increases in past elections had created a sanguineness bordering on complacency. Ill prepared, therefore, was such a party for severe disappointment, and the great loss befalling it has proved a disconcerting shock.

Confronted with the necessity of explaining, apologists assert that this defection is not that of "class-conscious Socialists." It is, according to most of these expounders, nothing more than the fluctuation of an unstable group easily led astray by the reforms or persuasive promises of other parties. Some mention also the general upsetting brought about by the war. All of them omit the pregnant fact that, when in prior elections this general class of voters supported the Socialist ticket, its accession was effusively hailed as a solid increase, and as the sure forerunner of the still more glorious expansion of the voting strength. Yet when large numbers of former Socialist voters withdrew their approval of the party, their action was set down as that of quondam mere "sentimental sympathizers" who had never become indoctrinated with the "principles of class solidarity."

Explanations like these are calculated to divert attention from the fact that a considerable portion of the loss was caused by widespread dissatisfaction with the party's practices. For to admit the truth would reflect seriously upon the quality of the leadership. The suppression of facts of which Socialists accuse their opponents is transmuted by some unfathomable process into "good party tactics" when

done by themselves. Any admission that disintegration has been spreading in their organization would be sure to impair the supposed value of what has become to them a sort of vested proprietorship. Hence the blame is cast upon the fickleness of voters. Their own system of ethics comprises not only the refusal of information about themselves, but the penalizing of the publication of it. When some years ago the *New Review*, a scholarly, independent Socialist periodical, made public the fact that in a single year 75,000 dues-paying members had left the organization, Socialist leaders were so enraged over the giving out of the fact and the conclusions stated that the *New Review* was formally boycotted and blacklisted by the Socialist party local in New York city. Nor is this an isolated instance.

For years, in fact, there has been cankering decay in the Socialist organization. A party boasting of its democracy was so far behind what it sneered at as "bourgeois movements" that it did not even tolerate a proposal for minority representation in its own ranks! The forms of democracy were outwardly observed in some respects, it is true, but the actual operation was in the hands of a bureaucracy intolerant of opposition.

It is instructive, therefore, to find that some of the Socialists who were once a part of that bureaucracy are now coming forward with the plaint that the party is not the exalted organization that they thought it. These critics happen to be essentially writers, not political leaders; yet it is not the long-festered effects of mental and spiritual distortion that prompt their strictures so much as the obvious loss of political prestige. Prodding into the superficial causes of decay, they vary in their findings, but all have burst into print as though they had made new discoveries. One of them laments that freedom of expression in the Socialist press is much restricted, while two others have gone so far as to say—one outright, the other by inference—that the mob spirit often surges through the organization, and that, to judge by copious precedent, "the mechanism of discipline" will be stringently applied, and the long line of suspensions and expulsions upon pretext will be increased; since to criticise is "to play into the hands of the capitalist class."

The Socialist party prefers to indulge the flattering sensation that it is a movement peculiarly distinct from all that have preceded. It is superior to the ignorances, passions, bigotries, and corruptions signaling so many other historic movements, each of which, by the way, made in its own time the same grandiose pretension. The Socialist

organization, its leaders would have us believe, is the only one which has been established upon an intelligent study of conditions and a clear grasp of remedies! In the very act of proclaiming this, Socialists fail to comprehend that overdone materialism—the real basis of their philosophy—breeds the most vicious kinds of bigotry, since it excludes any true understanding of the mental and spiritual depths of man. Theological bigotry has had its terrors, but unmitigated economic bigotry threatens greater. “The real trouble with our party,” declares a critic in a Socialist publication, “is that it lacks ideas.” He demands “a new vision,” but this is as far as he gets. Although he sees the insufficiency, if not the emptiness, of the party as it is, the materialistic concepts have been so drummed into him that he is unable to get a glimpse of what that vision might be.

Most of the idealists who have quit the Socialist party were altruists. They were devoted to ideas, and were not swayed by the indiscriminate aim for “practical power.” Their concern was for the dissemination of a right and firm understanding of conditions. An inflated growth based upon expediency and the lure of office-holding did not appeal to them. Their attitude was open to revision as facts dictated. Often at much sacrifice of their own material interests they joined the Socialist party, led into believing that it was the world’s one great worthy humanitarian movement. It was they who imparted earnestness, disinterested enthusiasm, fire, and vitality to the organization. Not for its own sake, but for their idea of what it promised, many of them unreservedly accepted the material dogma. Their vision was of a state of society in which, if guarantees of good subsistence were afforded to everybody, the human race, relieved of its sordid worries and conflicts, would ascend to noble heights of attainment and brotherhood.

The entrance of such men into the party was widely heralded, particularly of those having wealth or reputation. Now came the astonishing sight of a party in professed rebellion against wealth and its standards revealing itself as a worshipper of wealth and a truckler to it. Shortly after their admission some of these rich men were elected by this “proletarian party” to the National Executive Committee, the highest of its functioning bodies. One of them, finding himself thus suddenly exalted, was so amazed and disillusioned that he soon betook himself out of the party. Far from deprecating such a display of sycophancy, certain elements among what were called “the parlor Socialists” demonstrated by their conduct that no one can be so consummate a toady as the radical toady. But all self-respecting idealists were deeply distressed at seeing a professed “working-class party” imitate the worst of those “bourgeois methods” against which it had so insistently declaimed. Other seriously disquieting symptoms obtruded themselves. A party denouncing existing authority as tyrannical exalted its own intimidating inquisitorial authority as sacred and supreme. A party fulminating against other political parties as machine ridden evolved a machine which in arbitrariness has exceeded all others.

The facility with which the German Socialist organization was delivered over to the Kaiser’s military caste has, in the case of some idealists, been the final object lesson. A profound feeling of discouragement and disgust spread through them when they reflected that a philosophy which could not produce ordinary manhood in times of stress must

be woefully deficient. They viewed with repulsion a party that, instead of representing what to them were the broad, fluent aims of its original founders, had sunk to a drivel of formulas and, led by incapables and often by impostors, had become a fraud and a hoax. They saw with astonishment the movement from which they had expected such great humanitarian results used as a powerful instrument by war lords in the scientific accomplishment of slaughter. For it was the adhesion of the Socialist party in Germany, they see, that made the Kaiser’s Government and people so strong a unit in the preparations for war. To their shame they have had to admit that the much-rhapsodized movement is the only such movement known to the world which did not in the time of crucial test yield its willing martyrs. They found, to their further mortification, that Socialist leaders and their henchmen here in the United States were smugly asking why it was necessary to die to prove sincerity. The very act of self-sacrifice that might have greatly advanced their cause was absent when the need arose. It was lacking because the spirit of self-sacrifice is not compatible with a philosophy sodden with materialism.

The exit of the idealists has been accompanied by aspersions. If any queries have been made within the Socialist organization as to why they left, the invariable reply has been “for personal reasons.” The departure of such adherents was at first viewed with indifference by leaders estimating losses solely by arithmetic. But now that the fact is everywhere known of the enormous defection in November, the leaders can no longer conceal the decay of their party. Yet if they can they will avoid any real diagnosis of the causes, and it is to this diverting performance that they are now diligently applying themselves.

GUSTAVUS MYERS

The Swiss Danger-Line

RUSKIN thought no spot on earth gave the eye so wondrous a play of light and color as the slopes of the Jura Mountains. That was Nature, but he also agitated himself for Man, and was one of the few of his class in England to speak kindly of France when she lay crushed and mutilated by Germany after 1870. The Jura, all the way up to Belfort, looking out over the Alsatian plain where that German invasion and occupation continue, might still carry on his thought to Nature—

Where every prospect pleases
And only man is vile.

That is to say, some men—for, as they used to drill us in logical formulas, all A is not all B, even though B is limited to A. This chain of the Jura is not ninety miles long, and separates Swiss plateaus from French plains all the way north to Belfort, which is the Gate of Burgundy coming from Alsace; and it has become a war-line of suspicion and danger.

Neutrality is more wonderful than nature, surely. When war suddenly exploded from a sky clear to unpenetrating Frenchmen, they found they had not fortified and scarcely taken common military precautions against possible armies invading them from Belgium and Luxemburg and Switzerland. They trusted to sealed and signed guarantees of neutrality, which one of the signers tore in scraps while other signers, to emphasize their neutrality, kept silence.