
Martyring the Socialist Movement

by J. Louis Engdahl

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The American Socialist is dead! As the official mouthpiece of the national Socialist Party of America it has spoken its last. It has been martyred in the great, sacrifice-demanding cause of world, social, and industrial democracy and universal peace.

The national administration, which has seen fit to suppress the *American Socialist*, will not admit that it has been martyred. The Post Office department merely charges that we have violated a law passed to aid in the prosecution of the war, and that we should, therefore, be treated like any ordinary transgressor of the law.

I believe that the Post Office department has placed a wrong interpretation on the espionage law, under which the *American Socialist* was suppressed. Members of Congress who voted for the law make the same claim. Even the Department of Justice in Washington disagrees with the Post Office department in the interpretation of the law. I have pointed this out before. It cannot be shown too often. The *American Socialist* went to its grave struggling for the constitutional right of a free press, which no act of Congress has the power to change or modify.

The last issue, Saturday, September 8 [1917], went to press on Saturday, September 1, and, in conformity with our efforts to keep the paper alive pending the decision of the Post Office department on our application for another second class mailing privilege, a few thousands were sent to the larger cities by express for distribution by local carriers.

To seek to serve all of our subscribers in this manner meant early and complete bankruptcy. It was, therefore, decided on Wednesday, September 5, to cease entirely the publication of the *American Socialist* and to have the *Eye-Opener* go to all of the subscribers instead.

Two days later — Friday, September 7 — the Post Office notified the *Eye-Opener* that it could not serve the subscribers of the *American Socialist* if the *American Socialist* still remained in existence. If there was a single spark left in our paper, this ruling of the Post Office stamped it out completely.

There is no argument between the two positions: Permitting the *Eye-Opener*, with its second class privilege, to serve all the subscribers of the *American Socialist*, or trying to keep the *American Socialist* alive by sending out a few copies each week by express at great expense. The death sentence was not of our choosing. It was inevitable.

I urge upon all the former readers and subscribers of the *American Socialist* that you give the *Eye-Opener* the same unswerving support that you have always given your own paper. Serve it loyally and it will be loyal to you.



The *American Socialist* died in order that others might live. During the more than two months of bitter persecution that it suffered, it never raised its voice in its own behalf alone. It spoke for a free press everywhere. Whatever sacrifices it made were offered freely, in order that liberty of thought might not be abridged or crucified. It is still contended that every word it has uttered has been within the law.

Three issues, June 16, 23, and 30, the last being our famous Liberty Edition, were declared unmailable by the Post Office censor at Washington.

Beginning with the issues of July 7 and up to and including the issue of August 11, the *American Socialist* was issued under a local censorship in Chicago.

We were then notified that our second class mailing privilege had been revoked because the June issues had been declared unmailable. although these three issues had all been mailed to our subscribers, the Post Office, nevertheless, held that the continuity of the publication had been interrupted, and we were, therefore, no longer entitled to our mailing privilege.

Application was duly and immediately made for another second class mailing privilege. Four weeks have passed, however, and no decision has come from Washington. Week after week, we have waited in vain.

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Our counsel went to Washington and even had an audience with President Wilson, who declared he was opposed to the suppression of Socialist publications. The Department of Justice already declared not one article had appeared on which an indictment could be based.

We got our final answer on Wednesday afternoon, September 5, when a score of operatives from the federal building in Chicago, reinforced by deputy marshals and local police, swooped down on our offices and demanded everything in sight, from typewriters to mailing lists.

If the provisions of the search warrant served on the *American Socialist* and the Socialist Party national headquarters had been carried out, nothing would have been left but the bare walls.

When it became apparent to the federal district attorney's office that we had nothing to hide, that all the activities of the *American Socialist* and the Socialist Party had always been open and above board, the federal authorities satisfied themselves with a file of the *American Socialist*, copies of leaflets, pamphlets, and books, in addition to a few letters taken from our files, and the books showing our financial transactions. We do not now know what use they intend making of these.

The Chicago edition of the *American Socialist* was on the press when the printing plat where our paper was published was raided and all matrices and copy were seized.

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We must struggle as best we can to present our arguments to those in power, to present our case to Congress, to the courts, to the people. On the advice of Postmaster General [Albert S.] Bursleson, himself, we are planning to carry to the courts our contention that Socialist and radical publications are being illegally deprived of their second class mailing privileges. That is where we must now take our stand. That is where we must oppose with all the strength we have the further suppression of our press.

The *American Socialist* has never counseled violation of any law. It has not urged resistance to any act of Congress or proclamation of the President. It has only sought to voice the hopes and aspirations of enlightened labor in this great world conflagration.

I was told by Judge Herron of the Department of Justice in Washington, and by Postmaster Burleson of the Post Office department, that discussion of the big problems involved in this war is still permitted. The action of the Department of Justice here in Chicago seems to have overruled this position.

It is my belief that the administration will soon learn that it made a huge mistake in strangling the *American Socialist*, and in its efforts to suppress the Socialist Party.

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Only the other day the high officials of the government at Washington were complimenting the German Socialist newspapers for their favorable comment on Wilson's message to the pope. The administration declares it is cooperating with the present Socialist regime in Russia. Yet, here in the United States the powers on high at Washington seem bent on the destruction of the organized Socialist movement in this country.

The futility of this effort can be seen by a few facts. There are one million Socialist voters in the nation; 100,000 Socialist dues-paying members in 6,000 local organizations. The circulation of the Socialist press runs into the millions of subscribers. The persecution contemplated by the Democratic administration tends to swell, rather than shrink, these figures.

The mystery: What does the Democratic administration hope to accomplish by this latest act of tyranny?

Edited by Tim Davenport

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