
Sinclair Defends Socialist Papers: In Open Letter to President Denounces Barring Them from the Mails [event of Oct. 31, 1917]

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Upton Sinclair, who recently resigned from the Socialist Party because he disagreed with its anti-war views, yesterday made public an open letter to President Wilson, in which he protested against the suppression of Socialist publications.

Mr. Sinclair explained he made no appeal for papers which incite acts of treason or rebellion, violence, or crime. He continues:

“In the case of *The Masses*, the procedure was even worse — it can only be described as disgraceful; for the paper first had one issue barred from the mails, and then had its mailing privilege taken away on the ground that it had failed to appear regularly.

“Mr. President, the value of your letter to the Pope is the message it conveys to the German people, the hope it holds out to them that if they remove from the world the menace of autocracy they can have immediate peace. But how can we advocate democracy for foreign peoples, while we suppress it among our own? What good does it do us to fight for freedom abroad if, in the meantime, we are losing it at home? And do you not see that if such news goes to the people of Germany it will entirely stultify the message you have sent them through the Pope?

“One of the things which the Postmaster General says no paper may say is that ‘this government is the tool of Wall Street or the munition makers.’ Will Mr. Bursleson permit me to say that the German people say that? And when they read that we are suppressing newspapers they will say that our government is just the same as theirs, and that our preaching of democracy is just a snare for them.”

Mr. Sinclair referred to Postmaster Burleson as “a person of such pitiful and childish ignorance concerning modern movements that it is simply a calamity that in this crisis he should be the person to decide what may or may not be uttered by our radical press.”

As a remedy for regulating the radical press in wartime, Mr. Sinclair recommends that a public official be empowered to compel a publication to retract a false statement.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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