
Moderation, Comrades!

by Morris Hillquit

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The discussion occasioned by the Milwaukee incident in our party press and meetings has assumed an importance beyond the particular issue, and some of the views expressed and tendencies manifested in the course of that discussion merit our very serious consideration.

But first, a few words in my own behalf. My attitude in the unfortunate controversy has been criticized by some of my friends and others — notably the editor of the Toledo *Socialist* [Hermon Titus] and Comrade [William] Mailly in his recent editor to *The Worker* [New York] have expressed surprise at it. I cannot see that either was justified.

My views on the Milwaukee case may be briefly summarized as follows:

1. I do not feel called upon to pass judgment on the wisdom of the comrades of Milwaukee in abstaining from making nominations in the recent judicial elections in their city.

2. I disapprove unqualifiedly of Comrade Berger's act on advising the readers of his paper to vote for a candidate on an old party ticket.

3. I believe our party should adopt clear and unambiguous rules against the recurrence of such conditions as have brought about the Milwaukee trouble.

4. I am opposed to any punishment or disciplinary measures against the organization of the state of Wisconsin or that of the city of Milwaukee or against Victor L. Berger personally.

It is this last point particularly, I presume, which threw my good friends into a violent fit of mild surprise. There was no reason for it, I repeat. My attitude in the Berger case is absolutely consistent with my entire record in the Socialist movement. While I was always unalterably opposed to any compromise on vital questions of Socialist principles, I have steadfastly advocated a policy of tolerance in the dealings between

the party and its members on questions involving disputed points of tactics, and a spirit of fairness and conciliation in all discussions between comrades involving honest differences of opinion.

It was on this issue that the battle against "De-Leonism" in the old Socialist Labor Party was fought and won, and I have had no reason to change my views on the subject in any way. I am still "hysterical" enough to believe that the primary object of our party is to fight the common enemy from without, and that the fight against the "internal enemy" should be strictly limited to cases of willful and deliberate infractions of established party principles and tactics. I do not wish to be understood as encouraging any deviation from the well defined principles of proletarian socialism or any degree of laxity in party tactics. On the contrary, I believe that as soon as a fallacious or injurious tendency is noticed in any quarter of our movement, it should be energetically combated, but combated by argument and not by punishment — by discussion, not by expulsion. Our comrades are voluntary fighters for a great cause, not soldiers in compulsory service. We can maintain the purity and integrity of our party by educating the membership to a proper understanding of the nature and spirit of our movement, but never by a system of rigid discipline.

To apply these general principles to the case before us, I will say that I would not hesitate to vote for prompt and radical adoption against the Wisconsin organization if I had believed that the failure of Local Milwaukee to nominate candidates and Berger's subsequent advice to vote for Judge Wallber were part and parcel of one preconceived scheme, a deliberate political deal with Judge Wallber or the Republican Party. This *The Socialist* seems to imply, but I cannot find any justification for such a conclusion from the facts before us. Whatever I may think of the attitude of the

Wisconsin comrades towards the national organization of the party, I do not think them capable of entering into corrupt political deals with our enemies.

Comrade Maily claims that in the Milwaukee case an established rule of the party has been flagrantly violated and cites as a precedent the case of Local Santa Barbara, California, in which the facts are said to have been similar to those of Milwaukee and in which the charter of the local was revoked by the State Committee at the insistence of the National Quorum.† I have no knowledge of the exact facts in that case. Comrade Maily, referring to it, says: “The details are not given in the minutes;” but if the details are not given in the minutes, the action of the Quorum was never made known to and was never sanctioned by the members of the National Committee or the party at large. It has not established a “precedent” in any sense of the term.

To further emphasize this point, Comrade Maily says: “It is pretty safe to say that if a humble or unknown member instead of a prominent member like Berger had been guilty of the same offense, he would have been kicked out of his local almost before he would have had the time to make an explanation.” If this is really so, it is a very deplorable state of affairs, but to remedy it we would hereafter accord to the most humble member the same chance to defend himself and the same fair and impartial trial as the most prominent member of our party now enjoys, not conversely, subject the prominent member to the state of unfairness and lawlessness which is said to characterize our dealings with the “humble” member at present.

In conclusion, I wish to say that there are few men in the movement whom I respect more highly and with whose general views I am more nearly in accord than William Maily and Hermon Titus, and that I fully appreciate the excellent work of a paper like their Toledo *Socialist*, which has made it its special mission to watch over the integrity of the movement. But in all fairness and friendliness, I must say I fear that our good comrades take their task just a trifle too strenuously. In the recent article, “The Parting of the Ways,” and in their visions of a new Social Democratic Party to be organized by the terrible Berger, I feel that they are carried away by undue alarm. Young and weak as our party is, at this time it is already too strong to be shattered by an ill-considered utterance in a German weekly in Milwaukee with reference to the election of a probate judge of that city, or by the treacherous conduct of one of our “fathers” [Thomas J. Hagerty] on the lecture platform in San Francisco. It is all good and well to sneer at the “safe and sane leaders of the party” but some sense of measure and proportion is really not so very much out of the way for those who take a leading part in the moulding of our young movement. Within the comparatively short career of our movement we have managed to develop two new types within our ranks, the “Opportunist” and the “Impossibilist,” and I hardly think it will be conducive to our welfare to enrich our anthropological museum by a new species, that of the “Alarmist.”

†- **William Maily** (1871-1912), was National Secretary of the Socialist Party of America from Feb. 1, 1903 to Jan. 31, 1905; he cites precedent from the time of his tenure in the National Office. It should be noted that Maily was Business Manager of Hermon Titus’ Toledo weekly, *The Socialist*, and the two clearly worked together to fan the flames of the Berger affair. Maily was born in Pittsburgh and moved to Scotland with his parents at age 2. He went to school in Liverpool and worked from a young age as errand boy and clerk. Maily returned to US in July 1889, working in the Illinois coal mines, brick yards, and railways. In 1890 Maily moved to Alabama, working as a coal miner and taking part in an 1894 Alabama miners’ strike, eventually being blacklisted for his union sentiments. Maily was a delegate to the People’s Party state convention in Alabama in 1894. He entered journalism, working as Associate Editor of the *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, in 1895-96. In 1896 Maily moved to Nashville, Tennessee and joined the Socialist Labor Party. Maily left the SLP in July 1897 and helped form a branch of the new Social Democracy of America. He was a delegate to the Chicago convention of the SDA, June 1898. Thereafter he moved to Haverhill, MA. Maily served as the head of the Social Democratic Party’s state and municipal campaign committees in 1898. He was also named editor of the Haverhill *Social Democrat* in 1898. After his tenure as Executive Secretary of the Socialist Party, Maily went to work as Manager of *The Socialist* (Toledo, Ohio), edited by Hermon Titus, 1905. Maily was also a member of the 7 person NEC of SPA in 1905-06. He later moved to New York, where he worked as Associate Editor of *The Worker*, 1906-07 and Managing Editor of the *New York Evening Call*, 1908-09. Maily died at a young age, not quite 41. His widow, Bertha H. Maily, served on the SPA’s NEC for the year 1920-21.

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