

Battle Cry of Superstition (March 10, 1902)

Terre Haute, Ind., March 10 [1902].

The socialist movement encountered a great shock at Buffalo a few days ago. One Quigley, a Catholic bishop, and another Stauffer (Stuffer?) of the Protestant persuasion,¹ jointly and severally assailed social democracy, the latter gravely declaring that it was the “unhatched egg of anarchy” — in other words, a bad egg. The bishop vaulted into the arena, made due exhibition of his asininity, and in the name of the hierarchy proclaimed excommunication as the fate of all who cast their lot with the wicked socialists.²

No opposition to organized labor, declared the bishop, was intended, except in so far as it was tainted with the virus of socialism — a hint that union men would be wise to profit by.

It is not my purpose to write about religion, or to interfere with that of any man. I am trusting to the light and logic of the future to abolish creeds and dispel the darkness of superstition.

But we have those in the socialist movement who are so supersensitive that they rise in passionate protest when the church is even mentioned. They are doubtless honest and sincere, but their prejudice is such that if the orders and injunctions of such priests as Quigley and Stauffer could be and were obeyed, they would look on in silence and submission, while the church with iron boots crushed out the socialist movement and the sun of labor set in gloom to rise no more.

What has the church, as such, ever done for working men and women except to keep them in darkness, preach obedience to their masters, and promise them a future home in heaven as the reward of patience and submission in the present hell?

The fulmination of this precious combination at Buffalo reveals the true attitude of the church, which profanes the name of Jesus Christ. In all its pomp and power today it stands for all he abhorred and against all he loved; and socialists would be worse than cowards, they would be base-born traitors not to speak the truth and challenge the enemy of the socialist

movement in whatever form he may appear; and when the church consents to prostitute its functions in the service of the ruling class, its robes turn into rags and every honest man should help to strip it naked and expose the whited sepulcher to the world.

For more than 25 years I have watched the church in its attitude toward labor and I know it is the enemy of the toilers and strives and strains to keep them in industrial bondage. The freedom of the working class will mean the end of the church as we know it today. It will simply be out of a job.

During the Chicago strikes the priests and preachers grew hysterically violent in demanding the shooting and hanging of the strikers in the name of the meek and merciful Jesus. All denominations melted into one and all the ministers were likewise a unit in defense of the corporations and denunciation and damnation of the strikers.

There is something almost melancholy in seeing a meek, sad-eyed, dyspeptic preacher suddenly grow fierce and bloodthirsty. It seems strange, but it is easily accounted for. The priest is simply the echo of the capitalist. if he declines the function he ceases to preach.

In every labor strike I have ever known the church and those who speak for it have lined up solidly with the corporations. This has been and must be the attitude of the church whose priests now direct its fiery fulmination against socialism at Buffalo.

Through all the centuries the church has been the handmaid of tyranny and oppression — there she stands today, red with impotent rage because socialism has stripped her of her mask and challenged her to do her worst. Can the church extinguish the socialist movement? Can a bat snuff out the sun? It is high time the working class were opening their eyes, time that they were discarding the sacred (?) symbols of superstition and proclaiming their royal right to represent themselves without the vulgar and impertinent intervention of priests who are but the emissaries of their oppressors and exploiters.

They are no longer children to be scared by nursery goblins. They are growing up to manhood and as they climb the heights the dawn of socialism lights their way — its holy fires glow in their eyes and they can see as never before the glorious goal of freedom.

They are now beginning to understand the reason why their enemies are deified and their friends are damned. They see the church as the fort and buttress of the ruling robbers of society.

They hear the preachers in one voice denounce George Herron — a man so pure of heart and lofty of conception and conviction that he walks barefooted through the fire rather than disobey the command of conscience. And yet the Christian clergy at the behest of their capitalist masters poured out a tirade of foul calumny that would have blushed the devil — and this for no other reason than he was a socialist, a true friend of the working class.

The Buffalo preachers may spare their subsidized wrath. The socialist movement scorns their puny protest and defies their tottering power. The dark and dead ages of the past belong to the church — their living future belongs to socialism.

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The Amalgamated Iron, Steel and Tinplate Workers are again showing signs of life and activity again. They have just effected a settlement in New York, according to press advices.

I have a question for members of that organization. When their strike collapsed last summer, their union was totally at the mercy of John Pierpont Morgan. Figuratively speaking he had his heel on its neck. He could have crushed it as easily as the railroad corporations did the American Railway Union in 1894. He could have non-unionized every mill in the trust. He did not do it. Why?

Was he restrained by his love for labor or his fear of socialism?

The American Railway Union, created as a labor union, sprang up as the Social Democracy, now the Socialist Party.

The Amalgamated, as a labor union, votes the Republican ticket and is the bulwark of the steel trust.

Morgan profits by the experience of the past. He is a “union” man and will be until the union becomes class-conscious and its members vote as they strike.

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¹ Rev. Byron E. Stauffer (1870-1922) was the pastor of Grace Methodist Episcopal Church in Buffalo. Early in March 1902 he attacked socialism, arguing that “the socialist of today is

the anarchist of tomorrow,” destined to turn to the “violence and terrorism” of anarchism after society inevitably brushed aside his arguments.

² Bishop James Edward Quigley (1854-1915) attracted headlines in February 1902 with his proclamation that “a workingman may be a union man and a good Catholic, but he cannot be both a social democrat and a Catholic.”