
Socialism and the Race Problem:

A Speech to Black Workers.

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by Peter Kinnear

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(An address delivered by Peter Kinnear at Mt. Vernon and Champion Avenues, Labor Day evening, to an audience of colored people.)

Some weeks ago our worthy Mayor, at one of his tent meetings, was asked the question by a colored man, if Socialism would benefit the Negro.

The Mayor replied that “under no circumstances would Socialism benefit the Negro.”

I hold in my hand a little red book that certifies that I am a dues-paying member of the Socialist Party, an organized political party whose membership encircles the earth. This party is organized in the interests of all workingmen, regardless of race, color, or creed. Now if this statement of the Mayor were true, I would tear this red card into a thousand shreds, and forever sever my connections with this political party.

Now there are two things apparent in my mind; either the Mayor is deliberately lying about this great world movement, or he knows nothing of its philosophy or teachings. If he has lied, he is not worthy the support of any honest man, black or white; and if he is in ignorance of this scientific truth, he again is not worthy the support of the great mass of thinking workingmen that inhabit your city.

In our present mode of making a living, there are two classes: those who seek jobs (the working class) and those who own the factories, workshops, and mines, and have the jobs to offer (the Capitalistic class).

Now it is in the interest of that class (the Capitalistic class) that have jobs to offer, to have more skilled and unskilled job-seekers (workingmen) than there are jobs to be had. Consequently, these workingmen that have their brawn and muscles to sell are constantly underbidding one another for these jobs to be had, so that they can live.

As there are more job-seekers than there are jobs to be had, this causes a glutted labor market. The job owners want to hire labor as cheaply as possible, and the job-seekers want to get as high a wage as possible for their labor.

The Class Struggle.

This is what the Socialists call the Class Struggle, because the interests of both these classes are directly opposed to one another.

The skilled job-seekers — machinists, plumbers, bricklayers, hod-carriers, and others — to protect themselves against the job-owners and make it possible for them to get a higher wage, have organized themselves into unions. However, bricklayers are not as numerous as printers, therefore they can get a higher wage from the job-owners. And the printers are not as numerous as the machinists, consequently they are able to get a much higher wage than the machinists.

Colored workingmen, organized into the hodcarriers' unions, are able to get a much higher wage than colored men, unorganized and unskilled, that dig sewers and trenches. However colored men organized do not receive as high a wage as their white brother organized, because of the race question, based on prejudice, injected into the minds of the white workingman by the job-owners contending that the white workingman is superior to the black workingman. Therefore white union men up to now have always drawn the color line in their respective organizations.

Therefore the race question having prejudiced the white union man in the belief that he is superior to the colored man, he has always held aloof from the colored man when he went on strike against the job-owners for a higher living wage.

The Race Issues.

Consequently the colored man would always lose his strike and be compelled to work for a lesser wage. This naturally was a very pleasing arrangement for the job-owner, from a viewpoint of profit, therefore he kept the race question of "superiority" a live one.

However, we have found that when white workingmen went on strike against the job-owners, they would not hesitate one minute to hire colored men to scab against the white man, if they had anywhere near the qualifications necessary to hold the jobs. So you can readily see in times of peace the boss would hold the Negro in contempt and spread it among the white workmen, but in time of strife he will condescend and use the Negro to force the white man to work for a lesser wage.

This game on the part of the job-owners, was worked for a number of years in New Orleans. There the white dockworkers with their southern employers, looked down on the Negro with contempt. However, when the white dockworkers would resist an attempt on the part of the dock-owners to lower their wage by going on strike, the white dock-owners would advertise for Negroes to take their places.

Why?

Because it was a matter of physical endurance. The Negro could load cotton and fruits as well as the white man. It was a matter of physical strength, and no white man will deny but that the average Negro has as much strength as the average white man. So when it came to a matter of handling cotton on the docks, it was not a matter of race superiority, but a matter of good strong arms and hands. The Southern master, in the interest of having job-seekers work as cheaply as possible, forgot all about the race question.

Consequently, the white dockworkers lost one strike after another on account of his race prejudice against the Negro, who willingly scabbed against his white brother because he refused to recognize him as an equal in handling cotton, while the dock-owners laughed and smiled at every defeat of the white workers, whom they kept divided through the race question, with profit to themselves.

Work on the docks became unbearable. Wages became so low that white dockworkers on the wage they received were unable to buy enough nourishing food to keep up their strength so they could work. Of course the Negro had to suffer in the same proportion as the white man. However, there is a limit to all things.

The white dockworkers came to the realization that it was the Negro that they refused to accept into their organization that would eventually drive them off the docks, from the fact that there were more Negroes stepping in and taking the places of the men that dropped out from weakness and hunger than there were white men.

So the white dockworkers called a meeting of all the colored dockworkers to meet with them and discuss the situation. Lo and behold in this meeting the white dockworkers discovered that the Negro was just as much opposed to the conditions as they existed on the docks as the white men were. They found that the Negro did not scab on them through general cussedness, but through a lack of recognition on the part of the white man. The Negroes in their hearts were just as rebellious against the dock-masters as the whites were.

Race Lines Wiped Out.

After a general discussion, they came to the conclusion that they were all workingmen, regardless of race, color, or creed, and that they all were striving to better their material conditions surrounding their respective homes. That the only thing as workingmen that they had to sell to live was their labor, and if they wished to get a higher wage from all, that the color line would have to be dropped, and they form a massive union of whites and blacks. Race superiority, these workers discovered, was a myth, as their sentiments were one in common.

Then and there they organized the Dock and Cotton Council of New Orleans. To prove to the master that they had eliminated the race question they incorporated the following in their bylaws and constitution: that one year a white man should be president and a colored man secretary, and the next year a colored man should be president and a white man secretary.

Now united, they carried the war to the dock-owners' door, declaring a strike for higher wages and better dock conditions. The dock-owners adopted their previous tactics, by advertising for strike-breakers, both black and white, to take the strikers' places. The police and state militia were called out to assist the dock-owners to break this strike.

However, they were unsuccessful in this as the white dockworkers prevailed on the white workers to refused to scab, and the colored dockworkers did likewise with his race.

United Workers Win.

The strike prevailed in all its intensity for several weeks. Tropical fruits were spoiling by the shipload. Cotton was piling high on the docks by not being moved. The dockworkers, black and white, stood solidly side by side. Not one of them deserted the organization. This was a new one on the dock-owners, who had expected that in a week or so the workers, through stern necessity, would desert their union and go back to work.

So the dock-owners solicited ad conference to arbitrate their differences. They chose two arbitrators, the union two, a black and a white dockworker, and between the four they chose two more.

As they were ready to go into conference, the dock-owners objected to the Negro dockworker taking part in the discussion. They stated that they were highly insulted by being asked to sit at the same table with a "Nigger" and treat for terms. Here was the "Race Question" again.

The white dockworker, bearing in mind the suffering for years that this contention had brought to the white worker, arose in all his wrath and, placing his hand on the shoulder of his colored member, said: "When we white dockworkers went on strike, you did not hesitate to hire this 'Nigger' to take our jobs and break our strikes. You all did not care if he was black, as long as he unloaded and loaded the vessels. Then when the strike was over, you all would make us work with this 'Nigger,' eat with this 'Nigger,' and even sleep with this 'Nigger.' Now, damn you, you all will treat with this 'Nigger,' or we will not treat with you at all."

Employers Beaten.

The dock-owners at last saw that the "Race Question" as a ruse to divide the workers had failed. They saw opposed to them a working class that did not recognize race, color, or creed, when in came to a matter of bargaining collectively for higher wages and better conditions in the sale of the only thing they had, their labor-power, brawn and muscle. The dockworkers had solved the "Race Problem" among themselves.

Consequently the dock-owners submitted to the terms as proposed by the dockworkers. United they have defeated the dock-owners time and again.

They are now the best paid unskilled labor in the United States, some receiving as high a wage as \$100 per month. Through this you can readily see how quickly the working class will solve the "Race Question" when they once as a class recognize this principle of identity of their class interests.

Today the colored race are being told by the Master Class that they must solve their own destiny. On the other hand they instill into the minds of men the "superiority" of the white race. Whenever the colored man has been given an equal opportunity with his white brother, he has demonstrated his ability.

Result of Race Congress.

Some months ago a great race congress was held at Brussels. All races on the face of the globe were represented. The best picked men of every race were there. After several weeks of thorough discussion, they came to the conclusion that there was practically no difference in them as to ability in the arts and production.

They further came to the conclusion that "race superiority" was a farce and had no foundation. That it was all a matter of environment. That the black child and the white child raised in a slum would be

children of the slum. That the black child and the white child, raised in an atmosphere of learning and intelligence, would all naturally crave after knowledge. Therefore you all can readily see that it is only a matter of opportunity, and the colored race has the least opportunity of all.

Now I know that there is not a colored man within the hearing of my voice that would not like a better home to live in, better food to eat, better clothes to wear, better shoes to wear, and more leisure time to spend with his family. This craving within your hearts is the most natural thing that Nature has endowed you with. In this matter you feel as I do.

If this were not true, all colored people would live alike. But they don't. Some wear better clothes than others. Some live in better homes than others. Some can educate their children better than others.

How to bring about better opportunities for us all, white or black, of the working class, is what we are interested in tonight. I showed you how the dockworkers solved this question among themselves, and that same day is coming soon among us. The entire working class, white and black, must soon become united among themselves, whether they like it or not.

One Union, One Party.

Like the dockworkers, we must lay aside race prejudice that keeps us divided among ourselves. We must, like the dockworker, organize a large massive union upon the industrial field. Then when we go on strike, we all go on strike together. And then we must all get into a political party that stands for the principle of no race, color, or creed within its organization.

Already the white union men are commencing to discover this and are abolishing the color line. Some years ago the Moulders' Union discovered that whenever they went on strike that the boss imported Negroes to take their places. Now where in the world did these Negroes come from? Why Negroes never learned the moulding trade in the union shops, because the color line had been drawn. However, no matter where the Negroes came from, they were turning out castings and breaking their strike.

So the union moulders commenced to investigate and found that the Southern penitentiaries were turning out Negro convicts that learned the moulding trade within prison walls. They discovered that the job-owners had found another method wherewith they could force the iron moulder to accept a lower wage, by using this prison labor against the white iron worker. After the iron moulders were de-

feated several times in their strikes by this colored prison labor that could mould iron as well as they could, they like the white dockworkers came to the conclusion that something would have to be done with the Negro moulder, or the Negro moulder would break one strike of theirs after another.

Unions Getting Wise.

So they sent an organizer into the South, who is now organizing these colored men into the Iron Moulders' Union. The white union moulder discovered, as the white dockworker had, that "race superiority" was only a myth used by the job-owners to keep the workers divided against one another, so they could in time of need hire the Negro cheaper, to force down the wages of the white worker, because the Negro could mould iron just as well as the white man, even if he did learn his trade behind prison walls. This is about the extent of the average Negro worker to get an opportunity to learn a trade and demonstrate to the white man that he is capable of doing the things that heretofore have been done by the white man.

However, the Negro is exploited in another direction by the small job-owners. Take the hodcarriers, for instance. The boss will pick out the most active and strong Negro and make him the "leader" of the boys carrying the hod. This leader he pays probably 25 cents more a day for his work. He sets the pace for the rest of the hodcarriers, and woe be on the Negro that is not quite as strong as the leader. He will keep up with the leader's pace for a week or more and then he will have to quit his job, because he hasn't the physical endurance.

We find up until now that the Negro, through the white man barring him from learning a trade, by the drawing of the color line, has been forced into the ranks of common labor. And we further find that in the winter time the skilled worker, not having anything to do at his trade, will step in and take this common laborer's job at the price offered. I have seen bricklayers getting \$6.00 per day in the summer time, working for \$1.50 per day in the winter, digging sewers. Now this skilled worker certainly is scabbing on the common laborer when he does this, because there are more men seeking work at common labor than any other kind.

Common Laborer Up Against It.

However, the common laborer is finding it harder, year after year, to find employment at this class of work, because of the machinery that is being invented to do this work. For instance, some weeks ago I was observing a "steam shovel" digging out a cellar that took the

places of 200 common pick-and-shovel laborers. There were over 300 men standing on the bank watching this steam shovel doing the work they used to do.

A man standing along side of me had a dinner bucket in his hand. I noticed he wore a Machinists' button on his coat, proving to me that he was a union man. All of a sudden I heard him grit between his teeth, "That damn steam shovel!"

For a moment or so he gazed into space, as if deeply in thought, before he spoke. "Well, sir," he said, "I belong to the machinist trade, and hold my card in the union. Our work has been pretty slack all winter, and I have not had a job for four months. My rent and grocery bill is way overdue. Yesterday I was notified that I would have to pay my rent or move. My groceryman told me that he could not extend me any more credit. My wife through worrying of me being out of a job so long is lying at home sick.

"So this morning I said to my wife that I wasn't afraid to work at anything, and I was going out and get a job using the pick and shovel at common labor. So I came down here, thinking that they might need men to dig this cellar and load the wagons. But I find that they do not need men working at common labor anymore. That 'Damn Steam Shovel' has taken our jobs, as the automatic lathe has displaced the skilled machinist at his trade.

"Now," he said, "what are the 200 pick-and-shovel men that the steam shovel has displaced going to do to live? What provision has been made to take care of them?"

"None," I replied, "However, my friend, don't you think that there is something radically wrong today, when honest men, both white and black, are seeking employment at honest labor and find themselves displaced by this 'Damn Steam Shovel,' and no provision made to take care of them?"

The Only Solution.

"Now there is only one solution to this great machine problem," I continued, "and that is the social ownership of this 'Damn Steam Shovel' in the interest of all men that it has displaced. Today the steam shovel is owned by the job-owner. With its sale goes a guarantee that it will never go on strike for higher wages. The saving that the job-owner makes on the 200 men that he does not have to pay wages goes into his own pockets and fattens his profits.

"However, if this machine was owned by all the workingmen and operated in their interests by lightening their labor, it would be a blessing to them in place of a curse.

“Now if this steam shovel was run in the interest of the workers, and not the boss, the labor time would be equally divided among the 200 men that it displaced. In other words, 200 with the use of this steam shovel would work only one hour per day at the same wage, and shovel just as much dirt as they did by hand in ten hours, and at that do the work a great deal easier.”

“Yes,” he replied, “that would be the proper way to do it. Under such a system all the workingmen would receive the benefit of an invention, and it would not lessen jobs. But what worries me is, how are you going to bring this ownership of this steam shovel by all the workers about?”

“By getting into a political party that is organized for this very purpose,” I quickly replied.

The Only Party.

The Socialist Party, my friends, is organized for this very purpose: the social ownership of all the tools of production and distribution. Its relationship to this “Damn Steam Shovel” is such that the workers, both white and black, would receive the entire benefit therefrom, by working less hours at the full rate of pay. And this today is the great issue of all workingmen, both black and white. The question of getting a job and holding the same is the question that you hear discussed on every street corner.

The thousands of 200 men that are being daily displaced by modern machinery has made the job question an intense one. And the solving of this great question has brought about the Socialist Party.

It is the other wing of the Dockworkers’ Union — the political wing. Through this political wing all workingmen will someday express themselves for the ownership of their jobs.

“But,” will say the average colored man, “why don’t the Republican Party come out for this principle of the workers owning the jobs?”

Now, my friends, the colored man up to now has been a political asset of the Republican Party. Fifty years ago this party stood for a definite principle. It stood for the abolition of chattel slavery. However, in the last 50 years it has lost those principles, and is in the same position that the girl was that went to a dance.

While she and her beau was dancing around the floor, he notices a raveling, and while dancing he commenced to winding it around his hand.

The next morning the girl’s mother asked her how she enjoyed herself, and she replied: “Well, Ma, I had the best time of my life; but

when I came home and took off my clothes, I found that I had lost my union suit.”

That, my friends, is the position that the Republican Party holds today. In the last 50 years, unconsciously it has lost its principles. Today it is controlled, body and soul, all by the job-owners. The job-owners know that sooner or later the job-seekers are going to ask the question why thousands of honest men seeking employment from the job-owners are unable to get work.

They tell the Negro in one breath that he must solve his own destiny, and then in the next they take away from him the right to do so, by disqualifying him politically.

The Negro alone cannot solve his own destiny. He is part and parcel of the great working class, seeking a living. His destiny can only be solved in proportion to that, that the great mass of workingmen, white or colored, solve theirs. And they can only solve theirs by a united front, both industrially and politically, against the job-owners.

An Allegory.

Some twenty years ago, a terrible railroad accident occurred in New York City. To this train there was attached a carload of orphans, who were being taken to an orphanage.

There was a workingman that lived close by, by name of Mr. Workingclass. He heard the shrieks and cries of the hundreds that were crushed. He hastened thither to give what aid that he could. Entering the wreckage of the orphan car, he brought forth five little babies that were alive, under one year of age. Their suffering and cries were pitiful to behold.

So he hastened home and brought his wife, Mother Socialism. They tenderly carried these five living, crying babies home. Mother Socialism bathed all five thoroughly to see whether they were injured. Luckily this was not true, and in the light of the coal-oil lamp she and her husband fed them tenderly and put them to sleep.

The next morning, just as daylight was breaking, Father Workingclass arose and tiptoed into the small improvised nursery to take a peek at the five little orphans. And by the morning's glare he discovered that two of the babies were white, one was black, and the other two were a little Jap and a Chinese girl. So he softly called Mother Socialism and made her aware of this new condition that had arisen in his home.

“What shall we do with these five girl orphans, that represent every race, creed, and color?” he questioned.

“I shall adopt them all,” replied Mother Socialism. “For, Father, in our home we cannot recognize race, color, or creed. these are all nature’s children and are entitled to the earth and its fulness thereof. They are all the children of the working class who, up until now, have been fatherless and motherless. We shall raise them in our home, and as they grow up with one another, we shall recognize no distinction among them. We shall guard their interests as our own and shall instill into their hearts as they grow up the fallacy of race, creed, and color.”

So then and there they named the two white girls America and Europe. The colored girl they named Africa, the Jap girl Japan, and the other China. As these girls grew up they raced into the valleys and over the hills, free from every care and worry. Among them in play or school there was no distinction, and in the evening Father Working-class, tired from a day’s toil, would romp his adopted daughters, one and all, over his knees. To him and Mother Socialism the prattle of their childish talk was music alike.

And all these little orphans had tastes and ambitions alike. But their greatest ambition was to serve their adopted parents, to repay them for the sacrifices of the past. This truly was the happy home, “the ideal home of the workingman.”

So the five little girls started out one morning to seek employment in the marts of commerce.

Race Discrimination.

They presented themselves before a job-owner. He picked out the two white girls, as they were somewhat larger, and offered them positions at \$4.00 per week running sewing machines. So next he asked the little colored girl her name, and she replied, Africa.

“Can you sew?” he inquired, and the little African replied, “Yes, just as fast as my sisters. Mother Socialism taught us all alike.”

“Well,” replied the job-owner, “I can give you a position also, at \$3.00 per week, though. Because you do not need so good clothes as your sisters that I just hired. And then we have an off-corner where we will allow you to work. If these terms don’t suit you, you don’t have to work.”

Little Africa, crestfallen, but wanting to help her adopted parents, accepted the position.

Then Mr. Job Owner turned to the other two girls and inquired their names and if they could sew. They replied in the affirmative, and that Mother Socialism had taught them to sew.

“So,” replied Mr. Job Owner, “I will give you employment also. However, we can only pay you \$2.00 per week, because you are not big

eaters and can live on a rice diet. And we also have a separate room for you to work in.”

Now these two little girls, loving their father and mother as dearly as Europe, America, and Africa, and wanting to lighten their labors, accepted this rate of wage. Here asserted itself the thing that in times past they had been shielded from by Father Workingclass and Mother Socialism, the job-owner’s class distinction. They were for the first time in their lives separated, and their pay unequally divided.

That evening little Europe and America walked home together, while little Africa walked alone, followed in the rear by little Japan and China. They for the first time in their lives felt the class distinction among them brought on by the job-owner.

That evening there was no merry prattle among Father Workingclass’s children. No fond caress bestowed on his weary body. Mother Socialism also quickly observed this coolness among her daughters.

So they called their adopted daughters before them to find out if possible what the trouble was among them. And the five weeping daughters stood before their adopted parents and told them of the job-owner’s proposition as put before them.

And Father Workingclass replied: “For years I have nourished you with my labor, and by the sweat of my brow reared you into maidenhood. Therefore this arbitrary class ruling of Mr. Job Owner must cease.”

“And,” replied Mother Socialism, “I also for years have protected and endeavored to guide you in the teachings of mother nature, regardless of race, color, or creed. You are all my daughters that I love dearly without distinction, over whom I have wept many a tear, fearing the future outcome of what happened today. Therefore, Father Workingclass, let us take our daughters, united, in the morning and demolish in the mind of Mr. Job Owner the fallacy of race, color, or creed.”

The Happy Finale.

And that morning Father Workingclass, in all his strength, and Mother Socialism, in all her wrath, appeared before the factory doors and forever abolished the job-owner that incited in the hearts of his daughters the class distinction of race, creed, and color.

And so must today the working class unite themselves into an organization of physical strength, regardless of race, creed, or color, and under the guiding wing of Socialism, that is represented in every nation on the face of the earth, storm the political stronghold of the job-owners, forever abolish them, and bring about the democratic ownership of all jobs in the hands of the job-seekers.

Then, and then only, will the colored race solve its own destiny, and in solving it, they will assist in solving the destiny of the entire working class. For this will mean to every man, white or black, that works plenty of of employment, plenty of food, plenty of clothing, and plenty of decent, respectable homes to live in.

And then men will not curse the “Steam Shovel,” but welcome it as a blessing that has lightened labor, that has made it possible to produce thousands of times more wealth than heretofore, but all in the interests of the men that produced it, “The Working Class.”

Edited by Tim Davenport

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