
New Jersey Socialist Asks Governor to Right Wrong: Reilly Tells Edge Jersey City Police are Throttling Party's Campaign

by James M. Reilly

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James M. Reilly, Socialist candidate for United States Senator for New Jersey, has sent the following letter to Governor [Walter Evans] Edge:

As an American citizen, and also as a candidate of the Socialist Party for United States Senator, I desire to protest to you against a great and disgraceful wrong now being perpetrated by the Jersey City police, who, presumably, are acting under instructions received from the director of public safety.

Since September 13 [1918], the building of the Socialist Educational Club of Hudson County, Incorporated, which is used as a meeting place and headquarters by the Hudson County organization of the Socialist Party, has been closed by the police. The director of public safety announces that he will keep it closed until the termination of the present war.

The pretext for his action is this: About midnight September 11/12 agents for the Department of Justice visited this building and searched the premises. They were assisted in their search by the executive secretary of the Socialist Party [of New Jersey], Mr. Valentine Bausch. They examined the minutes of the County Committee, and some records. On leaving they took with them several copies of literature, some correspondence, copies of speeches made in Congress and, I understand, a cartoon. They made no arrests.

On September 13 a squad of police entered the building and ordered all present to leave. Since then it has been closed, with police officers constantly on guard. A committee of the Socialist Educational Club have been informed by the United States Commissioner that this action was not ordered by him.

The Socialist party has in this building at the present time 54,000 copies of a speech delivered in Congress last June by Hon. Meyer London. They are in franked envelopes. They were purchased from the United States government by the Socialist Party for distribution among the voters of Hudson County.

For some years past the Socialists have been having trouble with the department of public safety of Jersey City regarding street meetings. Last year, when we attempted to hold a street meeting there, I was arrested and fined under the disorderly persons (or, as the older lawyers call it, the "corner loafer") act.

We have recognized that in times like the present outdoor meetings may be attended by disorder. Past experience has taught us that we are usually blamed for any disturbances, by whosoever caused, that occur at our street meetings.

Last spring the party arranged a series of meetings, to be held in a large hall in Jersey City. The manager of the hall was prevented by the police from letting the place for this purpose.

Wishing to reach the voters with its message, as a political party has a right to do, the Socialists decided on a literature campaign. There were purchase from the United States government 60,000 copies of the aforesaid speech by Congressman London. Of these 6,000 copies had been mailed before the police closed the building. We are now prevented from sending out the remaining copies. The speech was delivered in the United States Congress, the copies were purchased from the United States government, and delivered to me by the post office department. We have a perfect right to distribute it, but the closing of our headquarters and the refusal of the police to allow us access to our property prevents us.

To sum up, Governor Edge, we have been hampered in every way by the police. First, they arrested our speakers. Then they prevented us from holding public mass meetings in halls. Now

they prevent us from distributing a speech that is part of the official proceedings of the Congress of the United States. We are refused access to our party records and other property necessary to us in carrying on our campaign. It is very evident that an attempt is being made to prevent a recognized political party from functioning. In fact, the owners of halls have lately been notified by the police that they are not to allow any Socialist organizations to meet in their places.

The press quotes the director of public safety as saying that the Socialists "ought to be shot," "interned for the war," etc., and, also, that if the police had arrested some of them, and battered up a few heads in the process, he would have been inclined to uphold them. It is quite evident that, as far as this official is concerned, the recent appeal of President Wilson not to play into the hands of the Imperial German government by practicing or counseling disorder, falls upon deaf ears.

I ask you, Governor Edge, can you, as a patriotic American citizen, countenance an attempt to throttle the campaign of a political party? Can you as governor of a great state, sworn to see that its laws are faithfully executed, countenance such lawless and unpatriotic utterances? I am sure you do not wish, as the probable nominee of your party for United States Senator, to have the party of one of your opponents prevented from bringing its principles to the attention of the voters. Such dirty politics, I am sure, have not your support. I should be glad to go to Trenton at any time to suit your convenience, should you desire a personal interview with me regarding these matters.

With full confidence in your sense of justice, as well as in your impartiality in the performance of the duties of your high office, I ask you to do whatever lies in your power to see that in Jersey City, the fountainhead of dirty politics, the laws of the state and the rights of political parties are respected.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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