

THE PEOPLE.

VOL. I, NO. 21.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, AUGUST 23, 1891.

PRICE 3 CENTS.

WHERE WE STAND.

More than one letter has been received by THE PEOPLE, from various parts of the country, in friendly criticism of its attitude towards the People's party. The phraseology may differ, but the argument in one and each—far apart though the places may be from which they hail—is the same in all, and consists of three points. First, the writers' avowal of their firmness in socialist principles; second, their admission of the essentially reactionary character until now displayed by the main body of the People's party; but third, the declaration that, by affiliating with it, certain specific capitalist institutions would be wiped out, and certain particularly objectionable capitalists would be spoiled. With regard to this third point, the writers are particularly full and diverse in illustrations. One is especially set against the bankers, another against Jay Gould, and two or three others have a rod in pickle for Depew.

The Social Movement, variously called the Labor Movement, or Socialism in short, is not founded on the spirit of revenge, or even on that of avenging wrongs. Its mission is constructive in the main, only incidentally destructive. And not the spirit of glorying over vanquished adversaries, but that of introducing a higher order of society is the moving spring of its actions. Proceeding upon these principles, it cannot, even by accident, fall into wrong tracks, whereas, it is just the readiness to listen to the siren songs of avengers that has so often side-tracked movements, otherwise promising, and that even to-day leads labor astray by fixing its hatred upon one individual, thereby drawing its attention {***} obtaining its support for some other individual or sets of individuals not a whit better than the first—both the offsprings of the same root of capitalism.

The implied argument that one thing at a time is easier of accomplishment than many, denotes disregard of the teachings of our own days. A generation ago such views might have been excusable; as yet, experience had not shown their fallacy. To-day, however, when, to the careful

observer the track of the social movement is seen to be strewn with the wrecks of one-thing-at-a-time movements, such opinions should no longer prevail. Only that which goes to the root of the evil opposed is “practical,” says Ruskin. To lop off the branches of the Upas tree of capitalism may be sport, affording physical and intellectual entertainment to the comfortable Gladstonian reformer; but should have no fascination for that extensive class whose sufferings must continue undiminished so long as the trunk itself of the Upas tree is allowed to stand. The tree is the capitalist, competitive, wage-slavery system of production. The small farm is doomed with the small factory. In the crash of both, there is no alternative for the people other than slavery, or the Co-operative Commonwealth and freedom. This is the issue. The axe must be laid to the trunk, not the branches. Aught else is but waste of time.

But, furthermore, civilization in general, the United States in particular, is approaching a social crisis. The result, whether society will emerge on the upward or the downward grade of evolution, depends upon the degree of clearness among the masses as to the road on which they are travelling. This clearness can only be effected by holding forth in all its purity the principles that guide onward and upward. To merge and fuse with movements admittedly crude and unconscious of their own significance, crude and unconscious to a degree that often gives them the stamp of reactionariness, would be to increase the confusion in the popular mind, already sufficiently at sea, and by so far to endanger the result.

Not immediate, but safe ultimate victory should be the aim of the social reformer. With malice toward none, with charity for all, yet with firmness at each contingency, the Socialist Labor party pursues its undeterred career. Guided by the light of experience, it knows that that union of forces, so necessary for ultimate success, will be soonest and safest reached on the path that it has struck. There is no union of forces worth the name that is not founded upon principles that are sound.

[Transcribed by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded February 2002]