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EDITORIAL

## OPEN LETTER TO THE ERIE, PA., “PUBLIC OWNERSHIP.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

**E**steemed Contemporary—

It is a principle of jurisprudence, hallowed by the moral sentiment of the race, that he who comes into a Court of Equity must come with clean hands: he who demands justice must himself be free from injustice.

In your issue of the first instant, you appear with a long article pleading for Socialist unity, and the smashing of idols. In stepping into that greatest of Equity Courts, the Court of Public Opinion, with no less exalted a demand than “unity of the Socialist forces,” do you come with clean hands, so to speak?

Among the people that you so address is a solid, compact body of 40,000 men who this year marched to the polls under the banner of the Socialist Labor Party, and who carried their colors across a never equaled volley of shot and shell fired from the capitalist guns. You know the name of that party to be as above stated; do you call it by its name? No. You fall in with the tactics of the capitalist press, that rarely can be got to give the name correctly, and refer to it as the “Social Labor Party.” Is this a coming into court with clean hands?

You refer to your “allies, the Socialist Labor Party,” and to their “generosity in surrendering their name.” You know that these your allies had no name to surrender. Political parties in this country, especially since the establishment of the Australian ballot, are not things of air. They are politically recognized entities, with specified rights. A body of men has no right to take what political designation it wants, if that political designation is held by another. Your allies tried to rob the Socialist Labor Party of its name. They established contests in a large number of States to secure it, and were beaten in all. In not a single State, of all the important States in the Union, could they come on the official ballot under that name. You know all this, and consequently, know that the name “Socialist Labor Party” with which they decked themselves was a false pretence, which they could not make good

in a single place. Yet knowing that, you not only falsify the rightful political name of the 40,000 who did political battle under that name, but you join your allies in giving them a designation to which they had no title, and impute to them a generosity that is fraudulent. Is that coming into court with clean hands?

Starting thus sinfully, you proceed to arguments of still deeper disingenuousness.

You correctly say that there are no sects of mathematicians, geologists, etc.; that there “is no such thing as a Calvinistic arithmetic, or Lutheran geometry,” etc.; and you conclude that equally intolerable are such divisions as “De Leon Socialism, or Debs Socialism.” The whole context of your argument leaves no doubt upon this, that, by “De Leon Socialism,” you mean the economic and sociologic principles and tactics of the Socialist Labor Party.

Surely there is no such thing as Calvinistic arithmetic:  $2+2=4$  everywhere. What would one think of the man, who, meaning to assail the arithmetic proposition that  $2+2=4$ , were to start by dubbing that proposition with the name of “Calvinistic.” Whoever has sense would look out for such a man. Such a man would be justly suspected of carrying up his sleeves some queer Heathen Chineese and Truthful James combination of arithmetic. And that is just what you are doing. Unable to produce a single allegation on which to hang the conclusion that the Socialism of the S.L.P. is “sectarian,” you dub it with a man’s name, and thus seek to dispose of it. This is begging the question. To seek to condemn a thing by simply giving it a name is disingenuous; it is also a bossy arrogance.

Having started with “unclean hands,” and then tumbled into disingenuousness, you round the circle by becoming ridiculous. Whoever contradicts himself makes himself ridiculous. You enter a crusade against “Idols.” You point out De Leon and Debs as the two “idols” in opposing camps, and call upon the masses to smash them. And yet you say that both of them were “rebuked by the dissent of a majority of those whom they assumed to lead”!! From this passage your call to arms against the idols is shown by yourself to be superfluous; it comes too late; it comes after they are already smashed,—according to your own words. A foot-in-the-mouth attitude is hardly calculated to make a good rallying center.

Finally, and leaving aside these points, the general tableau that you construct yourself into is not one that will promote that good feeling so essential to harmony. We let the Debs Social Democratic wing take care of itself. Turning to the Socialist Labor Party, it is safe to say that its good will could hardly be won by him who

approaches it with an affront. It is a willful insult that you offer this organization when you depict it as worshipfully obsequious to an idol. Its democratic form of organization excludes, to your own knowledge, any such bossism; and, to your own knowledge, this its democratic form of organization, that holds to a strict accounting every officer whom it selects to carry out its mandates, has been the chief cause of complaint against it; has earned for it the name of “narrow” and “intolerant” by all the crooks who would traffic in its name, and by all the freelances who sought under its mantle to gain distinction for themselves.

“Smash the idols!” “Smash the bosses!”—Yes. That is part of the educational work done by the Socialist Labor Party; and the work is being done to the orchestration of the yells and howls of all the would-be bosses and would-be idols, who, with boss and idol arrogance, deem themselves above the necessity of proving their assertions.

In the hope, Esteemed Contemporary, that you will mend your ways, we remain

Yours, etc.

DAILY PEOPLE,

Organ of the Socialist Labor Party of America

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

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