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GOVERNMENT BY PURCHASE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

The Baltimore & Ohio railroad has decided that its employees shall have nothing to do with politics, and the penalty for disobeying this order will be instant discharge. Any such order as this is the assumption that the road is a political office, with the power to enforce civil service rules. That power hitherto was supposed to belong exclusively to the government. When the Baltimore & Ohio takes upon itself the power to issue such an order it arrogates to itself one of the rights of the government. It assumes that it is the government, at least a limb of it.

Such formal orders are very seldom promulgated, but it has happened before now that workingmen who take a political stand in opposition to their owners, have been persuaded either to give up their job or give up their politics. This new departure is a long step in advance, because it gives the employer control of the men not only while they are at work, but also when they leave the shop or the place where they work and go to the political meeting or the polls.

The fiction of the independent voter could not be shown in a more thorough manner. The condition of master and servant extends beyond the field of employment; it penetrates into all functions. In the first place, the wages given must of necessity determine the conditions under which a person shall live. The employer also decides whether or not a man shall work at all. Now the employer, the master, decides that the employee, the servant, shall not, under any circumstances not determined by the employer himself, go into politics.

The rule is one which works in a certain way only. It is not meant that the workingmen on the Baltimore & Ohio railroad shall not vote, or even persuade others to vote, or go on the stump and speak, or assist in a political campaign. That apparently nullifies the whole rule. The rule nevertheless remains in full force. It is meant to cover working class politics only. As voters, the men on the railroads will be needed in the coming election, and they will be used for the advantage of those who employ, and consequently own, them.

The encouraging thing about this new rule is the fact that hitherto the men have taken part in various reform movements, or have openly advocated Democratic and Republican candidates, and nothing was said. The growth of working class politics brings forward a new phase, and the company issued the order, not because it found that politics interfered with the efficiency of the men, but because it feared the effects upon itself of the development of purely working class politics. The men might have gone on eternally advocating capitalist politics. That would have been to the advantage of the road. The instant that Socialism came forward the company recognized that its standing was menaced. The act, taken all in all, was a confession of cowardice, and a confession of the advance made by the Socialist Labor Party.

It is also a confession of the fact that the capitalist is considering himself more and more the government—by purchase.

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