

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 7, NO. 155.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 2, 1906.

TWO CENTS.

EDITORIAL

STEPS—BUT WHITHER!

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE Milwaukee Social Democratic, or Socialist party councilman Buech, a saloon keeper by profession, introduced in his City Council a resolution for drafting a bill making the mere passage of a worthless check a felony.

Mr. Buech has not lived in vain, nor in vain have been the successful efforts of his party to place him in office. The gentleman and his party have given a pithy answer to the question, Whither do the “steps” lead of Reform under the cloak of Socialism?

The aim and object of Socialism is to abolish the system of wage-slavery. Wage-slavery is that social system under which the land on which, and the machinery with which to work{,} are the private property of a small, the Capitalist Class. The land is no man’s product; it is a gift of Nature; it is “natural opportunity.” Machinery is the product of Labor; machinery represents the accumulated wages that Labor earned but the capitalist class appropriated; machinery is to-day an essential factor in production; it is “social opportunity.” Thus, both the “natural opportunities” and the “social opportunities” are, under wage-slavery, withheld from the Working Class by a system of theft, legalized by capitalism, but theft nevertheless, as a consequence of which an ever larger portion of the population, the swelling Working Class, are condemned to yield to the Capitalist Class the bulk of their own product before they can exercise their labor function and earn a living. Leaving aside the disastrous results to the Nation of such a social system, the worker pines in misery and is sunk into abjectedness. Socialism demands the overthrow of the wrongful system of wage-slavery by the collective ownership of the natural and the social opportunities of the land, to the end that he who works shall be guaranteed the enjoyment of his full social share; to the end that such guarantee may promote individual initiative, thrift and self-respect, instead of the worker’s

individuality being stamped out by a system that leaves him in dependence, however he may exert himself, and leads him to an early grave through exhaustion. Socialism, accordingly, spells Revolution. It spells the overthrow of the Capitalist Class.

The Reform-Socialist, or “Immediate-Demander,” or “One Step-at-a-Timer,” as the crew is variously called, do not deny any of the above propositions, or all of them in lump. On the contrary they admit them. They tire not to say that they “never will lose sight of the aim,” in the meantime, however, it is Socialist Labor Party “impossiblism” to do otherwise than to aim for “one thing at a time.”

Marx long ago characterized these gentry when he remarked that their aim was to make the capitalist feel more comfortable than he now is. The history of capitalist Christianity has illumined the spirit of the same gentry by exposing them as “never losing sight of the moral aim” of Christianity, but proceeding upon the “possibilist” lines of in the meantime outraging every principle of the morality that Christianity preaches. Mr. Buech and his Milwaukee so-called Socialist party prove both features with an up-to-date illustration.

There is not a factory in Milwaukee whose capitalist owner does not violate the factory laws, such as they are, on account of which workingmen and women are mutilated. There is not a capitalist concern of that city but is rotten-ripe for overhauling on charges of defying the law against Labor. The average earnings of the Working Class in that city, in the manufacturing and mechanical industries alone, have dropped since 1890, when they were \$430 per workingman, to \$425—without counting the increased cost of living. All this notwithstanding, the step-at-a-time taken by the Socialist party, or Social Democratic Buech is, not to demand the drafting of bills that may check the evils that capitalism works upon the Working Class, but to demand the drafting of bills that may protect small capitalists, saloon-keepers, for instance, from the evil effects of capitalism among them—the passing of worthless checks among themselves.

Two months ago *The Independent* published with a great flourish of trumpets an article on “Socialism” by the novelist H.G. Wells, in the course of which he pronounced the “relationship of capital or the employer to the employed,” as the “rustling of the hem” of the organized Socialist Movement. The essence of Socialism

is but a minor point with the Reform-Socialist. No wonder the apostle of this travesty on the Labor Movement, Mr. Victor L. Berger of Milwaukee, was the laughing stock even of the A.F. of L. convention. The “possibilist” Socialist does make “steps”—but whither? Straight to the swamp of bourgeois reform. “Reform Socialism” ignores the Working Class, except as voting cattle. “Reform Socialism,” with its law projects about “worthless checks” to keep middle class men from defrauding one another, is a fraud upon the workingman.

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Uploaded June 2009

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