

EDITORIAL

LOOKING THE ISSUE SQUARE IN THE FACE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THERE is a South American proverb to the effect that the monkey knows what tree he climbs: he knows better than to try his monkey shines on a tree that will not put up with him. Few, very few have been the monkeys in the Movement who have lately tried to climb the tree of the Socialist Labor Party press in order, from that place of vantage, to see what mischief they could do by way of preaching the negation of political action in a direct or veiled form and, assuming to speak for the Working Class of the land, bestow upon the S.L.P. the advice to disband. There have been a few of these folks, folks with even less sense than the South American monkey is given credit for. They fell before they clomb.¹ This office is, however, in receipt of a letter, that, although advising disbandment, is so mentally clean, however mistaken, that it deserves courteous treatment, all the more, because it affords an opportunity to consider certain recent happenings that have not hitherto been treated connectedly in these columns. At the risk of dignifying the gibbering monkeys with the decorum of our correspondent's letter, the letter is here given in full:

Editor *Daily* and *Weekly People*:

Events are transpiring these days in the labor movement which, to the careful observer, furnish conclusive evidence that the membership of the Socialist Labor Party are facing the most critical moment of their lives. We have arrived at a point where equivocations, and the reluctance to look the issue square in the face, can only result in prolonging for a short while the inevitable passing away of a once virile political organization.

It is useless, any further, to shut our eyes to the fact that the Socialist Labor Party, in its present relation to the labor movement, is atrophying and becoming functionless. The failure to recognize this fact will only result

¹ [Clomb: (verb, *archaic*) A past tense and a past participle of climb.]

in intensifying our humiliation when viewing the dismantlement of a powerful Labor Press, the building up of which has taken years of toil and sacrifice of the S.L.P. membership.

Such a deplorable loss to the working class must be avoided, and it can be done only in one way, the mere suggestion of which will no doubt call forth vigorous condemnation in some quarters. It is to be hoped, however, that those who condemn it will at least grant that it is made in all sincerity, and the welfare of the working class only is considered.

As was stated before, the S.L.P. is becoming functionless; not that this detracts from, or dims the glorious work the party has accomplished in the past. Its escutcheon is as spotless as when it first blazoned forth to the world the announcement that the principles advocated truly represented the interests of the proletariat. Not a breath of compromise, or treason to the working class, dims its luster. Proletarian interests have been preserved and guarded with a sublime faithfulness, enthusiasm and zealously.

But as man is simply one of Nature's economies, and the latter cares nothing for the individual outside of perpetuating the species, so the proletarian movement, in the abstract, contains no sentiment in its make-up; it utilizes and sacrifices its individual units with the same ruthlessness as does Nature—its own development, virility, and strength being its sole concern.

As every student knows, everything in Nature is subject to the laws of evolution; and as organisms, classes, systems, societies and solar bodies pass through the stages of birth, growth, decay and death, so are political parties subject to the same relentless law.

The proletarian movement has developed to a point where the continued existence of the Socialist Labor Party, as a separate political party, is no longer beneficial to the former's interests, and has become, therefore, a useless drag on the movement. In short, the mission of the S.L.P. is finished, new conditions have arisen and it is up to the party membership to face the conditions manfully.

What are these conditions?

A labor organization has been brought into being in the United States which, as all must admit, contains all the essentials requisite for carrying out Marxian teachings: e.g., that only from an economic organization, a true political expression of the working class can be developed. This organization is the Industrial Workers of the World, and it heralds to the world its non-affiliation with any political party whatsoever.

For the S.L.P., therefore, to continue further as a political party, separate from the I.W.W., means a repudiation of this principle—a principle in which the S.L.P. has played no mean part in framing and enunciating. To any longer remain separate from the I.W.W. simply spells confusion and following the line of greatest resistance.

What, then, is our duty?

As one, to which the traditions of our party are as dear as any, I

believe the I.W.W. has gathered strength and virility sufficient to enable it to give expression to its political aspirations through its own organization.

Now, for the suggestion: Let a referendum be submitted to the membership of the S.L.P. as to the advisability of entering into negotiations with the I.W.W. for the purpose of turning over to it our party press, to be used as its political weapon in furthering the cause of Industrial Unionism and the propagation of Socialist principles.

It is needless to state that practically all of the S.L.P. members are already members of the I.W.W.

By the absorption of the S.L.P. organization into the I.W.W., our efforts will not be divided between two separate bodies, and consequently all our efforts can be concentrated into the work of strengthening the economic organization and also lend our assistance towards launching, in due time, the political ship upon which the organization's political aspirations may be brought safely to an ultimate realization.

CHAS. H. ROSS.

Goldfield, Nev.

The issue presented by Ross is one purely of fact. On principle he stands squarefooted upon S.L.P. ground. There is no duplicity in his use of the words "politics" and "political." He recognizes the necessity of a political party backed by a revolutionary economic organization, and of a revolutionary economic organization shielded by its own political expression. There being no issue of principle involved, the issue of fact raised by our correspondent should not be difficult to settle.

What is that issue?

Ross is of the opinion that the I.W.W. now contains all the essentials requisite to carry out the Marxian programme. The correctness of that statement we deny—and so must Ross when he faces the facts squarely.

An organizer of the I.W.W. in New England, sent from the Chicago headquarters, avowedly repudiates and ridicules political action. To say that the ballot is a rattle to amuse children, unless it is backed by the required physical force—that is sensible, and Marxian. To say that the ballot is a rattle, or something to that effect, and stop there—that is nonsense and anti-Marxian.

Another organizer of the I.W.W. in the West preaches lodgishouses and restaurants as "revolutionary essentials," and does not allow *The People* in the reading rooms of his "essentials"—that policy is anything but conducive to Marxism.

A member of the G.E.B. is planted here in New York to "organize"—what? His

speech was published in *The Bulletin*. A man has no right to use the word “pin” when he means “chair,” and say he is sitting on a pin. The said G.E.B. member has been using the term political action in the way a man would who says “pin” for “chair”—that is veiled dynamitism, it is anti-Marxism, all the more pronounced seeing that the said gentleman boldly (if foolishness can be called boldness) announces that he proposes to amend Marx.

Let us look up higher.

Beginning with last summer, *The Bulletin* began to assail the S.L.P. through assault upon *The People*. There were five distinct assaults before *The People* decided that war was provoked, and that the fire had to be returned. One of these assaults was a slander upon the S.T. & L.A. element in the I.W.W., and, in order to give the slander a color of justification, it had to be backed up with such charlatan economics as that “prices INVARIABLY go up before wages.”—That is not Marxism.

And that whole sequence of conduct, that began with last summer, is even worse than un-Marxist. The I.W.W. would be justified to handle politics now by assaulting a political organization that assaulted it. But the S.L.P. (whatever injudiciousness through excess of love a member here or there may have been guilty of) through its officers and its press has been a loyal, devoted and self-sacrificing supporter of the I.W.W. To open fire upon it, to allow the I.W.W. organ to become an asylum from which discredited S.L.P. soreheads could squirt their dirt upon the S.L.P.—that is, we shall not call it black ingratitude, because that takes up another feature of the affair, but, to stick to the issue of fact raised by Ross, we must call it greenness, such greenness that is “too green to burn,” seeing that it can redound only to the increased confusion of the already sufficiently confused American proletariat.

Finally, let us look at the rank and file. Will Ross seriously say that the rank and file of the I.W.W. is now sufficiently homogeneous in principle and tactics to be entitled to his estimate of it? The facts are the other way. The I.W.W. has the germ of all that we may aspire after; it is entitled to all the devotion that the S.L.P. has bestowed upon it; it has done well, wonderfully well, in view of all the difficulties it has had to contend with. But to say it has already reached that point of ripeness when the S.L.P. should disband for its sake, and entrust it with the dearly acquired

S.L.P. press and propaganda powers—to say that is to be blind to facts. The I.W.W., shielded by the political clause in its own Preamble, has still much constructively revolutionary economic work to do before the S.L.P. can pass over.

Ross's noble aspirations run away with him. The Anarchists in the land may not be numerous, but they are a noisy set. On the other hand, the existence of, not the opposite extreme, but the obverse of the very medal, the reverse of which is Anarchy, to wit, a political party of pure and simple political Socialism, greatly complicates the situation in America. At this season, and under present I.W.W. conditions of unripeness, for the S.L.P. to disband and pass its press over to the I.W.W. would set the Movement back 50 years. For the S.L.P. to disband, and pass its press over to the I.W.W. at this time, before the I.W.W. has developed sufficient strength and homogeneity to set up its own political party, would be to kill the hen before she hatched out her eggs; it would be an invitation to Commune disasters in that it would promote Anarchy by leaving the political field to a party of pure and simple Socialism—an inevitable breeder of dynamitic Anarchism, with all the corruption that that implies. If the S.L.P. can avoid it, the American Working Class shall be spared that affliction, and the Movement that setback.

Not one minute will the S.L.P. be found to remain a “useless drag” upon the Labor Movement. It is as anxious as any could be for the day when it can disband with that shout of joy that will come from the sense that its arduous mission is fulfilled. That that day has not yet come; that to do so now would mean disaster to the Movement—these are facts, which, however painful, can not be denied by any one who looks the issue square in the face.

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

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