

EDITORIAL

THE DOWNFALL OF BARNES.

By DANIEL DE LEON

IT is not as “the latest instance of Socialist party corruption” that we stop this day to contemplate the resignation from his office, under charges, by J. Mahlon Barnes, the National Secretary of the Socialist party, as previously reported by special correspondence from Chicago.

For one thing, the instances. of corrupt conduct on the part of S.P. officials have been documentarily cited in these columns with such profusion that, in view of the many other important events of the day, this particular one could be ignored.

For another thing, however strenuous the efforts of the S.P. privately owned press to suppress the facts in the case, the efforts will prove futile. The facts are so scandalous—the debauchery they reveal is so outré, the graft so tell-tale—that their very fumes will raise the lid, and keep it raised.

The downfall of Mr. Barnes preaches a sermon of singular import.

Though a blot upon mankind, especially upon the Socialist Movement, Mr. Barnes might have held his post indefinitely. He buttressed too many kindred “Interests” among his party’s officialdom to be easily assailable; and they, in turn, buttressed up him. His own downfall would mean, at least, the insecurity of his fellows, if not their downfall also. Yet he fell. What caused the catastrophe? To say, as our Chicago special correspondence indicates, that the Jane Keep affidavit did it, is to miss the point. Weighty though the Jane Keep affidavit is, itself was the consequence of a cause, not the cause itself. What, then, was the cause of the event? In that lies the significance, the gravity, of the event, for event it is, which to appreciate requires a retrospect.

J. Mahlon Barnes is a member of Gompers’s Cigarmakers’ Union in Philadelphia, and was a member of the Socialist Labor Party until the split of 1899. In that affair he took a loud part. Although, until shortly before, he had been one of the

principal suppliers of the information at the time published by *The People* regarding “the crimes that were being committed against the rank and file of the cigarmakers, and the working class generally,” by the officers of his Union; and although he was enthusiastic in the organization of the Socialist Trade & Labor Alliance, to the end of putting a stop to the scabbery of Gompersism,—all this notwithstanding, Mr. Barnes suddenly figured among the busiest inventors of slanders against the Socialist Labor Party, and loudest echoer of the slanders shouted by the Gompers element. We shall here resist the allurements of a digression to explain this sudden somersault back. Upon that also the Jane Keep affidavit throws a flashlight. We rather proceed with the sequence of occurrences requisite to appreciate the lesson of Mr. Barnes’s downfall.

Within six months, the split engineered by the Gompers element in and outside of the S.L.P. had petered out. The New Yorker Volkszeitung corporation—together with its Moses Hilkowitz, now Morris Hillquit, and Barnes—which was the center of the conspiracy, was beaten to a standstill. Mr. Thomas J. Morgan, who, although of no affinity with the *New Yorker Volkszeitung*, rushed to this city to the assistance of the conspirators, has recently, having since fallen out with his allies of 1899, let out in his *Provoker* many an interesting bit of information on the plight he found the *Volkszeitung*-Hilkowitz-Barnes combination in. With the defeat of the splitters, the campaign of slander which signalled the split substantially subsided. What was left of it were only occasional shrieks of despair. Six months later, that is, about a year after the split, the campaign of slander regained its feet—the Barneses, Hillquits and *Volkszeitungs* had found their tongues anew, and wagged them ever since with increasing velocity, loudness, malignity and assurance. What had happened?

In the West, Eugene V. Debs, seconded by Victor L. Berger, had just started a Socialist political movement of their own. The Debs Movement was not started in hostility to the S.L.P. Although differing on fundamental points from the S.L.P., the Debs Movement bore, due to the Trades Union posture for which Debs had by that time become known, marked affinity with the S.L.P. For that Movement the *Volkszeitung* corporation had no use. It hated Berger on account of the merciless, yet well merited, style with which, in his German paper, he ridiculed {the} *Volkszeitung’s* stupidity; it mistrusted Debs on account of his Trades Union posture. But the

Volkszeitung was in dire distress. Its corruption and well nigh incredible ignorance had forfeited for it the respect of the German working population. Its one-time close to 27,000 circulation had dwindled down to less than 5,000. Its placemen panted for cash. This the *Volkszeitung* could get from the labor leaders of the speedily to be Civic-Federationized and now even Militia-of-Christized Gompers Unions, provided it caused *The People*, of which it then was the publisher under a contract with the S.L.P., to hush up on Gompersian scabism. Having failed in its attempt to bribe *The People*, the *Volkszeitung* had then sought to earn its Judas pence by smashing the S.L.P. and its organ, hence its activity in bringing about the split. And now the split had failed. Under the stress of this multitude of tribulations, the *Volkszeitung* and its stockholder Hillquit swallowed their hatred for Berger, shut their eyes to Debs's Trades Union "heresies," and rushed into the Debs Movement for asylum. Of course J. Mahlon Barnes went along as part of the inventory. The Barnes-Hillquit-*Volkszeitung* campaign of slander against the S.L.P. immediately revived; the near to 100,000 votes polled by Debs in November of that same year gave fresh stimulus to the slanderers' tongues; in the measure that the S.P. vote increased and the vote of the, S.L.P. diminished, as it did for a while, the slanders grew in loudness and in volume; finally, when, a few years later, Mr. Barnes was installed National Secretary of the S.P. and Mr. Hillquit was landed in the S.P. National Executive and on the International Socialist Bureau, the campaign of slander became boundless. The Barneses and Hillquits appropriated to themselves the votes that Debs's popularity collected—and, mark this, GREW CONFIDENT OF IMPUNITY.

Another sequence of occurrences now converges with the sequence just rapidly sketched. This second sequence is of recent date.

As was to be excepted when men of the stamp of Mr. Barnes and Mr. Hillquit, together with kindred spirits which they picked up "along the road as they went," come to headship in a political party, corruption speedily broke out in "high places." To say nothing of actions galore of political immorality, get-rich-quick schemes sprang up, like mushrooms, over-night to pluck the rank and file,—all of which were made public by the *Daily* and *Weekly People*, fast as ascertained. In these acts of misconduct, Mr. Barnes set the pace going to the extreme of dead-beatism, and turning the S.P. headquarters into a brothel.

One of the victims of Mr. Barnes's dead-beatism was Mother Jones. She had loaned him about \$200. Unable to recover the sum she placed her case in the hands of an S.P. lawyer, Thos. J. Morgan. In his *Provoker* Morgan had already been camping on the trail of Mr. Barnes and the Barneses. He forced Barnes to return Mother Jones's loan, and he published her case, together with charges concerning Barnes's dissoluteness at headquarters. Another paper, the *Chicago Christian Socialist*, also the *Denver Miners' Magazine* took up the hue-and-cry raised in the *Provoker*.

The S.P. National Executive, on which Mr. Barnes's creatures and creators, Mr. Hillquit among the lot, had a majority, long refused "to notice the silly charges." One of them, Mr. Robert Hunter, went further than ignoring the charges against Mr. Barnes; he turned upon Mr. Barnes's accusers, and in the S.P. *Official Bulletin* of November 26, 1910, said: "It seems too absurd to pay attention to scandal. Men circulating scandalous and malicious statements will, in time, discredit themselves. My opinion is that we should go on doing our work, and if there are sharpshooters behind who are firing into our backs, let them go ahead with their work. They may injure a man here and there, but their own malice blinds their eyes to such an extent that they can not shoot right"; and Mr. Hunter, propelled by the habits of his Barnes-Hillquit associates of meeting charges against themselves with vilifications of the S.L.P. and its officers, went out of its way, in that same communication, to say: "In time they [the accusers of Mr. Barnes] will be discredited by their actions as De Leon and others have been in the past," a statement due to which, as readers of *The People* will remember, Mr. Hunter being requested by D.B. Moore of Willow, Okla., to specify, and he having attempted to make his vilification good, was nailed by Moore as a falsifier and slanderer. Despite all these manoeuvres, the hue-and-cry against Barnes grew louder, until finally a "drastic investigation" of the charges was ordered by the National Executive. The performance took place early this year, with Mr. Hillquit as the attorney for Mr. Barnes.

The issue of the "drastic investigation" illustrates the truth of the observation that the scorpion carries with him the poison that kills him; it illustrates the wisdom of the advice to give to rope to malefactors, they will hang themselves.

Easy would it have been for the "drastic investigators" to make a show of dras-ticness and let their respective creature and creator, Mr. Barnes, off with some

slight reprimand. That would have been the course of wisdom, and the privately owned S.P. press, controlled by the Barneses and Hillquits, could have been relied upon to befog their party's rank-and-file with declamations against "head-hunts" and other "S.L.P. measures of vindictiveness." Mr. Barnes would have been safe. But wisdom is not to be expected from men of the Barnes-Hillquit stamp, who have long enjoyed impunity, aye, even success, in slander.

What! Reprimand their Barnes, however gently? That would be to reprimand themselves. Mock Caesars can brook not the slightest reflection upon themselves.

What! Whitewash their Barnes, and stop there? That would be to encourage the "De Leonist impossibilists."

No, none of that would do. The dementia, born of a ten-year-long practice of tolerated slander, perpetrated to cover up outrage, carried the day. What happened was foreshadowed by Robert Hunter's letter cited above. Not only was Mr. Barnes whitewashed, but his accusers were condemned. Prominent among these was Mother Jones who was "found guilty" of extortion on the allegation that Barnes had returned to her the loan, but not having taken the precaution of securing any evidence of repayment, she demanded the money over again!

Whatever our opinion of Mother Jones' intellectual soundness in the Labor Movement, one thing we, together with all who are acquainted with her, know. Her failings are of the sentimental, not of the moral turpitude brand. She would no more take advantage of not having given a receipt, and extort a second payment than we would. The slander against Mother Jones, aggravated with slurs upon her decency, caused the measure to overflow. In the heat of the indignation that the outrage aroused the Jane Keep affidavit was ripened into existence.

Thus it is seen that the affidavit that whelmed Mr. Barnes was not itself a cause. It is the final consequence of a long chain of acts, done, not by Mr. Barnes's accusers, but done by his own pals—a more than ten years long chain, every successive link of which proceeded increasingly from contempt for the intelligence of the people—a long chain, every link of which was forged in the heat of the fatuous theory that "you can cheat all the people all the time"—a long chain, the last link of which shouts, loud enough to be heard by all who have ears to hear, Tweed's brazenly confident question: "What are you going to do about it?" with which he at first

met the charges of theft in office.

The downfall of J. Mahlon Barnes greatly helps to clear the stifling atmosphere in which the Socialist Movement has been held by the Barneses and Hillquits. It is to be hoped that it is a prelude to further clearings, until finally the great issues that divide Socialist opinion may be discussed upon their merits. In the meantime, and until that great day shall have arrived, the militant Socialist draws comfort from this the latest proof that Slander can be relied upon to grow so demented by impunity as to dig its own grave.

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