

EDITORIAL

THE CAUCUS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

IT is a good thing that the deadlock in the New York Legislature over the election of a United States Senator has lasted long enough to have produced an extensive discussion on the "Caucus." The half truths on the subject uttered by Tammany, the long list of "historic precedents" reeled off by the Insurgent Democrats—one and the other present the disputants, both the Sheehan Caucus shouters and the Insurgent anti-caucusers, in the unenviable light of special pleaders, not of men who stand upon a principle, and draw power of argument from the principle's soundness.

Where people, generally agreed upon some general principle, either disagree upon the specific method to enforce the principle, or are at sea on the matter, they, although a majority, might be easily beaten by a hostile minority that is agreed in general and in detail. The Caucus prevents the danger. By meeting, and discussing, and "fighting it out" among themselves, a majority ORGANIZES itself. The Caucus is, accordingly, but a method in the arsenal of organization—a civilized method to promote the civilized aim of battle instead of riot in legislative halls.

This being the Caucus, scores of subsidiary principles are involved in its application.

At last years election 115 Democrats were elected to the two houses of the New York Legislature. These were a majority of the whole body. Upon them devolved the duty and right to elect the successor to Chauncey M. Depew. A number of candidates were named. It was out of all question that 115 men, located in different parts of the State, could by letter confer and determine upon a fit candidate. The Caucus steps in at such junctures. At such junctures the members of a body meet, discuss and agree.

As the time drew near for the Legislature to meet it transpired that, with

Charles F. Murphy as their messenger boy, or clearing-house (the poor fellow is called a “Boss”!), certain interests clerical and lay, had worked in the dark, and compelled the pledges of a majority of the 115 Democratic legislators in favor of Sheehan, the least bad that can be said of whom is that he is a Tammany politician. With this majority in chains Murphy went to Albany and called a Caucus.

Any other name—mouse trap, spider web, etc.,—suited the gathering that Murphy called better than the name of Caucus. The gathering lacked all the essentials for a caucus. The majority of the 115 members controlled by Murphy were not the majority of the Legislature. To turn the Murphy band into a majority he required the rest of the Democratic members. The proposed so-called Caucus was accordingly merely a mouse trap. The minority members refused to be trapped. Hence the deadlock.

There is not a principle of parliamentary practice that the Sheehanites can invoke in their own behalf. The Caucus is not a mouse trap, it is a gathering of free men, gathered to make their freedom effective by organization. The loaded dice trick has no place in the Caucus.

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