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EDITORIAL

WHY “OFFICIALDOM”?

By DANIEL DE LEON

FOUR letters have accumulated on the Letter-Box file concerning the same subject. They came in at different times in the course of the last two months, and were shoved back in the interest of other communications that were considered of greater importance. A fifth letter to the same purport having arrived this week, all the five are here taken up in a bunch.

One and all of these five correspondents comment upon the policy of *The People* of drawing a distinction between the rank and file of the Socialist party and its officers. As one of them puts it, *The People* “distinguishes between the membership of the S.P. and the party’s ‘officialdom.’ Is not a membership responsible for its officers, and are not the officers the collective symbol of the membership of a body? Why leave the membership alone and attack its officers? Why ‘officialdom?’”

As a general proposition, it is true that the membership of a body is responsible for its officers, hence the officers of a body symbolize the body itself. This is another version of the saying that “a people have the government that they deserve.” The saying, however, is not a “close fit.” Russia illustrates the point. The people of Russia certainly dislike their government. They certainly deserve better things than “Stolypinism.” Nevertheless, such is often the weight of things that be that they continue indefinitely, long after they cease to be wanted. The Knout-power of the Moscovite to-day outweighs the popular opposition thereto.

The parallel between the Russian people and the S.P. “membership,” on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the physical knout wielded by the Moscovite bureaucracy, and the knout of a privately owned press swung by the officers of the S.P., is so close that it justifies being drawn.

It should be unnecessary to pursue the answer to our correspondents’ question any further. Nevertheless, we shall demonstrate with a recent, and national illustration.

About a couple of months ago, the National Executive Committee of the Socialist party met by hurry-call in Chicago to consider the sudden resignation of their National Secretary, J. Mahlon Barnes.

Mr. Barnes had shortly before been "triumphantly acquitted," by the instrumentality of that same N.E.C., of charges of gross immorality and grafting, and the acquitters had gone so far as, with the aid of their privately owned press, to besmirch iniquitously the character of Mr. Barnes's accusers, the venerable Mother Jones, among others. What was it that now ailed Mr. Barnes ?

It was an instance of effect swiftly following cause. Encouraged by his successful misdemeanors, Mr. Barnes had immediately proceeded to improve upon them. Whereupon his new victim turned upon him with an affidavit whereby she whelmed the miscreant. He resigned—had to. His N.E.C. accepted the resignation—had to. But, again with the aid of their privately owned press, which suppressed the affidavit, the N.E.C. of the S.P. wielded the knout over the intelligence of their party's membership.

The report of the N.E.C. of the S.P. upon this latest and last performance of Mr. Barnes's as National Secretary appeared in the said privately owned S.P. press in the course of last July and August:—

The affiant's testimony to the effect that she had been employed by Mr. Barnes at the party's headquarters under the assumed name of Miss J. Lipple and "promising her \$14.00 a week, \$2.00 of which affiant was to hand him back" was jauntily disposed of in the report with the answer that the affiant owed Mr. Barnes \$30.00 which the \$2.00 a week from her salary of \$14 were to cancel;—as if a woman ever, especially in these days of ours, could owe money to the father of her child.

The affiant's testimony, backed with letters from Mr. Barnes, exhibiting the depravity of his conduct towards her, together with his levity towards his own party's dignity, the report disposes of pecksniffishly with the regulation S.P. officialdom's manoeuvre of seeking to turn their own misdeeds into virtues with the plea that the Socialist Labor Party, slandered by themselves, had long before exposed and condemned the offense.

The affiant's circumstantial testimony, specifically backed up with letters from Mr. Barnes, to the effect that on May 4, 1904, (only seven years ago) she gave birth to a child, now 7 years old, of whom Mr. Barnes is the father, and whom he recognized as such, and that she was employed at the headquarters under his charge as

late as July 10 of this very year,—that circumstantial and specific testimony is disposed of in the report with the brazenly false statement that the “resurrectors” of these “buried memories” had “gone back fourteen years” in order “to prosecute our comrade.”

Finally, all this is accompanied with praises for Mr. Barnes as an innocent man, against whom a “malicious campaign of scandalous gossip” was carried on, and with the endorsement of his resignation “for the good of the party”—as tho’ such a thing ever was known as the resignation of an innocent officer under charges, and as though such an act can be “for the good” of a party that holds the officer innocent.

The S.P. “membership” has not revolted against these doings. Yet we hold that “all the facts are not yet in court” to justify the holding of the S.P. rank and file responsible for conduct so barbaric and dishonorable, anymore than for the political and other acts of corruption of its officers and privately owned press. Of course there is a limit of time to such indulgence. Until the limit shall have been reached and passed, we prefer to give the S.P. “membership” the benefit of the doubt, and to draw the line between it and its exploiters, the S.P. Officialdom.

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