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ARTICLE

THE SOCIALIST LABOR PARTY ON MAY DAY.

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“Proletarian revolutions . . . criticize themselves constantly; constantly interrupt themselves in their own course; come back to what seems to have been accomplished, in order to start over anew; scorn with cruel thoroughness the half measures, weaknesses and meannesses of their first attempts; seem to throw down their adversary only in order to enable him to draw fresh strength from the earth, and again rise up against him in more gigantic stature; constantly recoil in fear before the undefined monster magnitude of their own objects—until finally that situation is created which renders all retreat impossible, and the conditions themselves cry out:

“Hic Rhodus, hic salta!”

“Here is the rose, now dance!”

—Karl Marx

MARX, in the foregoing quotation, brilliantly summed up the course of proletarian revolutions; and, it may be said, also proletarian movements. It is sixty years since Marx made the statement. At the time he spoke of proletarian revolutions of “the nineteenth century,” but this was only by way of contrast with bourgeois revolutions of the eighteenth century. And if he said “nineteenth century” in this case, his observation is equally applicable to twentieth century conditions.

When Marx made the statement the European proletariat had immediately behind it the proletarian uprisings of 1848, culminating with the June massacres in Paris in that year. Previously there was the Utopian Socialist Movement,—to be sure, not a strictly working class movement, yet realizing the iniquities of capitalist production. There was also the League of the Just, and then came the Communist League, following which rose the grand old International. Later we beheld the rise of the Socialist political movements of Europe. Each time the proletariat rose on more strongly organized lines, a fact in strict keeping with Marx’s dictum.

The constant reorganization and overhauling in the ranks of the Labor and So-

cialist Movement has gone on apace, and the twentieth century finds “history in the making” in the world’s proletarian movement.

Let us, on this occasion of May Day, glance over a few modern incidents in the Socialist and Labor Movement in this country. Twenty-two years ago the Socialist Labor Party stepped upon the political field as a party of the working class with NO COMPROMISE for its motto; no compromise in principle or practice. That policy has been sturdily and gloriously adhered to. Previously it had allowed itself to support political movements, such as the Henry George movement, in the 1880’s, a movement which, while taking on the colors of radicalism, was not revolutionary. That line of action proved disastrous to Socialism. Scheming politicians could use the Socialist movement for their own ambitions, but would never stand by out and out Socialist demands. And the Socialists suffered from any defections which those whom they endorsed were guilty of. Thus the Socialist Movement was almost paralyzed in 1888 in New York, where the flirtation with Georgeites had been carried on. In 1890 a new leaf was turned; the old policy was rejected, rigorously rejected; compromise staunchly forbidden, and a new leaf turned in the history of the Socialist Movement in this country. That was reorganization No. 1.

As a consequence of this new policy, no compromise and open fire upon all the foes and pretended friends of the movement, the Socialist Labor Party earned the undying hatred of so-called radicals and reformers. The Populist or People’s Party, is an instance in point. There were also the “Me-Too Socialists.” But the S.L.P. kept up the fire and nobly acquitted itself. It hammered class consciousness into the Socialist Movement in America; it insisted on the tactics of the class struggle, while other so-called Socialist papers, among them the *Coming Nation*, *Appeal to Reason*, and later the *Social Democratic Herald*, as well as would-be Socialist movements, scoffed at this doctrine. The S.L.P. stuck to the colors of Marxian Socialism undeterred; its object was to launch such a Socialist movement in this land as could not be shipwrecked on the rocks of reform, a movement which could steer the proletarian ship through all dangerous currents besetting its course and guide it into the safe haven of Socialism. How magnificently, how courageously, how correctly the S.L.P. has handled the rudder of that ship has never been questioned,—can never be questioned. The angry epithets of “intolerance,” “narrow-minded,” “authoritar-

ian,” hurled at the Socialist Labor Party during that 1890–1900 decade are eloquent testimonials of the intrepidity and the firmness with which the Socialist Labor Party hewed to the line of the class struggle. No more monkeying or wavering was tolerated, clear, undiluted, Marxian Socialism was demanded. “No betrayal of the working class!” either through sentimentalism or otherwise, was the slogan. The S.L.P. carried that slogan through; the battle was terrific, but the S.L.P. came out triumphant; to-day {“}class consciousness,” which was a bone of contention, is no longer scoffed at; it is recognized.

With the entry of the S.L.P. upon the field of no compromise, it not only gave battle to the political foes of Labor, but also opened fire upon the fallacies of craft unionism, and deployed its forces against so-called labor leaders; and with good reason. No need here to go into an argument on the mistaken notions of craft unionism or on the corruption of labor leaders who shout “no politics in the union,”—tabooing Socialist, or working class politics only, but steeping themselves in capitalist class politics up to the eyebrows. The one and the other iniquities are well-known. The S.L.P. set itself to the task of cleaning up the iniquities, and, with a heroism born of conviction and high purpose, held to its course. The result: After making their experience inside the old line unions and learning of the futility of simply “boring from within,” the trade union members of the Socialist Labor Party set up a Socialist labor union, the Socialist Trades {sic} and Labor Alliance, in 1895. The evil influence of the labor fakir was to be destroyed, and the economic and political movements were to march together, the one supporting the other, jointly toward the Socialist, or Industrial Republic. Thus another leaf was turned in the history of the Socialist Movement in this land, and a decided step forward was taken.

But now again the battle raged. If the Socialist Labor Party before was compelled to fight the capitalist foe, the sentimentalists and reformers, and empty-headed radicals, it now found an additional foe on its hands, nay, two; the pure and simple trade union leader and those whom he profited in the ranks of the Socialist Movement, such as the N.Y. “Volkszeitungites,” and its English poodle, *The Worker*, together with the “Philadelphia Tageblatts,” and numerous other sheets, whose editors being in the Socialist Movement, were dependent upon craft union support. But the S.L.P. never flinched; it never asked any quarter, and gave none; it was con-

cerned only with standing by the demands of the hour, revolutionary Socialism, and the success of the working class. Craft scabbery was denounced; the S.T. & L.A. bared the crimes of craft unionism, and preached a new unionism instead, Socialist unionism, and again came out triumphant.

History emphatically endorses the ideas battled for by the S.L.P. and S.T. & L.A. The ideas have borne fruit; see but the Industrial Workers of the World. The evils of craft scabbery are recognized; see the movements afoot for “system federations.” Note also the industrial union movement on foot all over the world, Europe, Australia, South Africa, besides here in America; not fully industrialist are all, ’tis true, but they are moving, moving forward, and the S.T. & L.A. and S.L.P. men can claim the credit of giving them their impulsion. And thus another page is turned in the history of the Labor Movement.

Before us, on this May Day, we see a new vista opening; we see the marine federations forming, we see the solidarity of English workmen, we’ve seen it in France, in Sweden, and in Spain, we see it in all the calls coming to the New Jersey Industrial Workers of the World for organizers, we see even so conservative and hide-bound an organization as the Brotherhood of Engineers touched off by the spark,—who then in the face of this history in the making can say that the Socialist Labor Party has labored in vain? The S.L.P. has done yeoman service to the Labor Movement, as it is still called upon to do. The S.L.P., following the brilliant teachings of Marx, has writ in letters of gold upon the scrolls of modern history; the Party gathers new strength and inspiration from its glorious deeds of the past for the arduous work of the future, and celebrates on this May Day confirmed that it alone is equipped with the knowledge and the courage to crown the efforts of the International Proletariat for Emancipation from Wage-Slavery.

The S.L.P. rejoices with the world’s workers on this occasion and sends international greetings to all.

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