

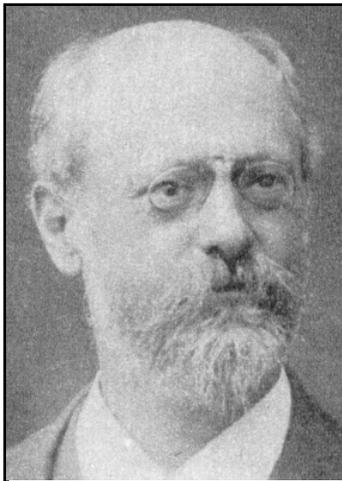
EDITORIAL

## AN OPEN LETTER TO KARL KAUTSKY.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**K**ARL KAUTSKY,  
Berlin, Germany:  
Fellow Socialist:—

The Socialist Labor Party being thoroughly imbued with the soundness of Engels's observation that the proletariat of each country will have to settle accounts with its own bourgeois, another way of saying that the Movement in this country will have to be fought out in this country itself, not abroad, it is not the purpose of this open letter to enlist outside alliances, or to transfer the American issues of the day to foreign shores.



KARL KAUTSKY

All the same, aware of the necessary internationality of the Movement; aware also of the magnitude and multiplicity of the issues that in Germany and surrounding nations keep your hands and minds full, allowing our European fellow Socialists little if any opportunity to keep themselves well informed on things American;—aware of these combined circumstances, we think it may promote your clearness of vision in general to address these lines to you, relative to your letter on the subject of “Legality” in the Socialist Movement, addressed to a Hungarian member of the Socialist party in this city, printed in the *New Yorker Volkzeitung* of last December 29, and which it was our delight to translate into English and publish in the *Daily People* of the following day.

Needless to say that your presentation of principles in the premises was brilliantly correct. For that very reason it may be well to have us point out to you a serious respect in which you slipped.

The Socialist party member whom you answered having furnished you with only a few clippings in the controversy then going on within the S.P. between Hillquit and Haywood, you held that, without a knowledge of the context (*Zusammenhang*), you did not feel warranted to express an opinion. This was wisely cautious. It was less cautious immediately thereupon to suppose a context, and then declare, as you do, that you “side with Hillquit.” We feel quite sure—judging from several passages in your brilliant letter—that, were you posted on the full “*Zusammenhang*,” you would have been less ready to “side with Hillquit.”

The full “*Zusammenhang*” in the affair is not to be gathered from the letters in the discussion. Only a fractional “*Zusammenhang*” is to be gathered therefrom. The full “*Zusammenhang*” can be gathered only from the events immediately preceding and that gave birth to the affair.

Everyone posted on American affairs knows that the American Federation of Labor, although composed of a mainly labor rank-and-file, is no more a Labor Organization than is the Army of your Emperor, which likewise consists of a mainly workingmen’s soldier constituency. And for reasons virtually identical. As the purpose of your Emperor’s Army is not to emancipate the working class, but far otherwise and to the contrary; and as that purpose is firmly held in the grip of the Army’s officers, from the Emperor down; so likewise is the purpose of the A.F. of L. far other and to the contrary than the emancipation of the wage-earner, and that purpose is as firmly held in the fist of the A.F. of L.’s officers, from the National Civic Federation, lately supplemented with the Roman Catholic Militia of Christ, down to Gompers, his lieutenants and assistant lieutenants. Agreeable to such a purpose, the Unions in the A.F. of L. are “contracted” with their employers to scab upon one another; the bulk of the working class is kept out of the Unions by a number of schemes, high initiations among them; and the Labor Movement is hamstrung, dislocated and kept disorganized. The estimate of the A.F. of L. made by the Berlin *Vorwaerts* on August 8, 1909, as “*duerres Holz*” (dead wood), however seemingly severe, stated the fact mildly.

Against this iniquitous state of things a succession of efforts have been put forth. The latest was the launching, in 1905, of the Industrial Workers of the World, with the avowed purpose of unifying the working class on both the political and the

industrial field.

The birth of the I.W.W. was the signal for a repetition of the scenes that were enacted on the occasion of previous efforts to emancipate the Labor Movement from the clutches and influence of the A.F. of L. The A.F. of L. officials engineered strikes against the I.W.W. membership; organized strikebreakers against them; raised scabbery upon the I.W.W. to the dignity of “patriotism”—all this with the hoopla of the capitalist press, and also, be it noted with the *pontifical blessings of the Socialist party press*.

The dove, sent out in 1905 from the Ark of Noah that rides the deluge of the American Labor Movement, returned to the Ark. It found no land to light upon. The very next convention of the I.W.W., 1906, suffered a serious defection. The third convention, 1907, recorded further shrinkage. When the time for the fourth convention, 1908, drew near there was hardly anything left to hold a convention with. The national officers seriously considered holding none. At that juncture rode up and in the legitimate heir of all ruins—ANARCHY.

At that so-called Fourth Annual Convention of the I.W.W., held in Chicago, Anarchy held high carnival. It appropriately began with the slugging of a non-Anarchist delegate. A New York “delegate,” Elizabeth Gurley-Flynn, denounced the non-Anarchist element as “police-spies” because they objected to theft, and the “delegates” of her stamp, who prided themselves for having traveled across the country from the West stealing chickens, applauded the theory to the echo. Finally, upon the motion of a Minneapolis Anarchist, Axelson, the clause in the original Preamble, which urged the unification of the proletariat “upon the political as well as the industrial field,” was amended by striking out the political clause with “arguments” denunciatory of the ballot. Fittingly enough, the performances were enlivened and illumined by a bunch of “roughnecks” whose favorite song had for its refrain—“I am a bum! I am a bum!” (Ich bin ein Lump! Ich bin ein Lump!)—Upon this head we recommend to you the account given in the Stuttgart *Metall-Arbeiter-Zeitung* by “Chagrin,” that enterprising labor-paper’s agent in this country during the years 1908–1910.

It goes without saying that whatever healthy workingmen’s element there was still left in the I.W.W. disconnected itself from the “I’m-a-bummery” (Die Lumperei).

That healthy element, however crippled in numbers, set up its headquarters in Detroit, Mich., and with Detroit as headquarters, has ever since held up the standard of the I.W.W., persistently carrying out the I.W.W. propaganda, and steadily progressing, however slowly.

As to the “I’m-a-bummery,” it rapidly unfolded from its premises. Usurping the name of “I.W.W.,” it set up its national organ at Spokane, Wash., *The Industrial Worker*, and through its columns, plump and plain, preached theft as a means of Labor’s revindication, and recommended, with articles and pictures, “to strike at the ballot box with an axe.” Free speech, that great conquest of civilization, it desecrated by giving the name of “Free Speech Fight” to riot and disorder in Spokane. Playing upon the emotions of the unthinking, it collected about \$9,000 “to help the martyrs” of that fight who were put in jail; and their own editor, James Wilson, subsequently denounced the leaders for stealing the bulk of the money, appropriating it to their own uses, while the “martyrs” languished in jail, and some even died as a consequence. From Spokane as a center, the “I’m-a-bummery” radiated as far east as McKees Rock, in the State of Pennsylvania, where it left its bloody imprint in the gore of workingmen whom it had infuriated to deeds of insanity for which they were shot by constables, and whence, so soon as the danger grew critical, its agents vamoosed, some back to the West, one here to New York. Etc., etc., etc., etc.

Now, then, during that whole period—from the time that the “I’m-a-bummery” usurped the name of the I.W.W., turned their “I.W.W.” into a theft-advocating, anti-ballot and “Direct Action” concern, and entered upon the career rapidly outlined above—the Socialist party press, which down to 1908 had hostilized the I.W.W. to its utmost, made common cause with the I’m-a-bummery. In the fraternal relations thus suddenly established, the *New Yorker Volkszeitung* and the *New York Call*, both of them papers in which Mr. Morris Hillquit is an influential stockholder and figure, took a leading part. Even the pictures of the noisiest I’m-a-bums were published with glorifying comments. The two papers became veritable “Rogues’ Galleries,” with the evident approbation of Mr. Hillquit.

There surely is in the German language some expression equivalent to the English: “From that mud came this dust.” From the mud of the posture held by what may be called Mr. Hillquit’s two organs toward the I’m-a-bummery came the dust of

the Hillquit-Haywood controversy.

Haywood—at the time the National Secretary of the Western Federation of Miners—was the chairman of the 1905 convention that organized the I.W.W. It was with his valuable and intelligent aid as chairman, and with the aid of the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance delegation, expressly praised by him, that things were licked into such shape as the first convention afforded an opportunity to, and the new body was planted upon the sound and ethic position that it took.

Before the expiration of the year, Haywood, together with Moyer, the President of the W.F. of M., and Pettibone were kidnapped from Denver and transported to Idaho, there to stand trial on the charge of having dynamited ex-Governor Steunenberg. Upon their triumphant acquittal, Moyer and Haywood fared differently at the hands of their union. While Moyer was preserved in his office of President of the Western Federation of Miners, Haywood was quietly dropped from his National Secretaryship. This happened at about the time that the I'm-a-bummery started. Up to that time Haywood, though a member of the Socialist party, was a silent, and non-active member. Having now to earn his living at some other occupation, he became an active agitator for the S.P.—and the I'm-a-bummery having found favor with, and being in favor with, the S.P., Mr. Hillquit's organs leading, Haywood's agitation was conducted along the I'm-a-bum lines, as an I'm-a-bum specialist in the S.P. For a time all went well between Hillquit and Haywood, each representing fraternally the side that supplemented the other, until the inevitable clash came between the two.

In view of these historic facts, and this historic sequence (*Zusammenhang*); in view, furthermore, of the unquestionable correctness of the principle your letter sets forth, that “it is emphatically necessary to oppose individual, Illegal Action, together with its preachments, in all lands where the conditions for Legal Organization are found extant”; and of the unquestionable correctness of the further principle which your letter enunciates to the effect that “everywhere, and under all circumstances, is Individual Action against individual property to be rejected”; and of the likewise unquestionable truthfulness of your allegation that “the mass of the wage earners despise the thief”, and that the weapons of the in-secret-plotting slum proletariat “are the Lie and the Breach of Trust”;—in fine, in view of all this, had

you been posted upon the full context (*Zusammenhang*) of the Hillquit-Haywood controversy, we seriously doubt that you would have lined up on the “side of Hillquit”; indeed, we feel quite sure you would have kept your skirts clear of both contestants, both being tarred with the same stick.

With Socialist greetings,

EDITOR DAILY PEOPLE.

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