

EDITORIAL

LABOR IN POLITICS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

ON the eve of Election Day comes, from one quarter of the country, Massachusetts, the pronouncement that “the working men are a minority in the land,” hence, have no right to rule; from another quarter, Washington State, comes the question, hurled by an anti-politicalist to a Socialist Labor Party agitator: “What will you do with the thousands who have no vote?”

Pronouncement and question are intimately connected. The one is meant to bar the workers from the right to rule; the other is meant to proclaim their disability to express their political views, which comes down to the same thing as to disfranchise them.

One and other are errors.

As a matter of fact, at least 60 per cent of the population are of the working class. Much tho’ official statistics seek to blur the fact, a critical analysis of the figures establishes it. Under the rubric of “Working Class” belong all those whose living depends upon their success in selling their labor power in the labor market, and who have nothing to live on but the proceeds of the sale. As there is no hard and fast line that {di}vides species in biology neither are there any such lines in sociology. Wage-slaves there are who have a small deposit in a bank; wage-slaves there are who “own” a house. Altho’ such property would seem to raise its owner out of the working class, and not infrequently is powerful enough to deceive him into a belief that he is not a workingman, nevertheless the assistance he gets out of his “holdings” is too small to tip the scales in favor of a more privileged economic class status. At least 65 per cent of our population must sell—either directly or through their breadwinner—its labor-power in the labor-market, or starve. So far as numbers go the working class are the majority—the overwhelming majority.

But have all the units in this 65 per cent mass a vote? No. All the same, all can

figure actively in politics. Repeatedly has the false reasoning been met and overthrown in these columns to the effect that “if a worker has no vote he is useless in a political party;” nor have the arguments that overthrow the false reasoning been ever once as much as tackled. They may here be summed up:

“Political activity is not circumscribed to the act of casting a vote: The purpose of Labor or Socialist political activity being to organize by educating for the Revolution,—that being the purpose of Labor or Socialist political activity, that activity may be exercised in manifold ways other than voting. Important as the voting is, the militant’s work of propaganda is inestimable, and propaganda—by word of mouth, or the distribution of literature—can be carried on by non-voters as well as voters.”}

So far as numbers are concerned, or are the determining factor in the matter, the Working Class is so large in numbers as to be entitled to rule.

So far as political activity is concerned, there is not a member of the Working Class, except infants and the infirm, who can not gloriously participate in the same.

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