

EDITORIAL

THE S.P. POLITICIAN.

By DANIEL DE LEON

MR. Robert Hunter's article in the *Brewery Workers' Journal* of the first of this month, utilized by us last week as a study of the S.P. mental cripple,¹ may now be utilized as a study of mental anatomy—the anatomy of the mentality of the S.P. politician.

“Direct Action” is a technical term in the history of the modern Social Question. “Direct Action” means not “Physical Force” merely. It does not mean that “Physical Force” of which Marx said it was the “midwife of revolutions.” “Direct Action” has in the history of the Movement the express meaning of “physical force to the exclusion of political action,” which the term “Direct Action” sneers at as “Indirect Action” and utterly futile. Unfamiliar with the subject which he presumes to handle Mr. Hunter confuses “Physical Force” with “Direct Action” and says:

“In 1904 there was not a trace of direct action in De Leon's thought.”

—Fact:

In the address *The Burning Question of Trades Unionism*, delivered at Newark, N.J. on April 21, 1904, the following passages occur:

“What is that great historic revolutionary mission [of Unionism]? . . . I shall show you that unless the political aspect of the labor movement is grasped, Socialism will never triumph; and unless the trade union aspect is grasped the day of its triumph will be the day of its defeat. . . . Did you notice and did you realize all that there was in the capitalist threat of closing down the shops and stopping production if Bryan was elected 1896? . . . The fact was brought out in his campaign by that upper capitalist threat that the ruling capitalists have it in their power to create a panic any time the government slips from their hands. What places that power in their hands? Now watch close, think close—WHAT PLACES THAT POWER IN THEIR HANDS IS THE PURE AND SIMPLE TRADES UN-

¹ [See “Bobby Self-Exposed,” February 5, 1913—R.B.]

ION: it is the fact that the WORKING CLASS is not organized. And I have shown you that the pure and simple trades union is unable to organize the working class; that it keeps the working class hopelessly divided. The majority of the voters are workingmen. But even if this majority were to sweep the political field on a class-conscious, that is, a bona fide labor or Socialist ticket, they would find the capitalist able to throw the country into the chaos of a panic and to famine unless they, THE WORKINGMEN, WERE SO WELL ORGANIZED IN THE SHOPS THAT THEY COULD LAUGH AT ALL SHUT-DOWN ORDERS, AND CARRY ON PRODUCTION. . . The trades union has a supreme mission. That mission is nothing short of organizing by uniting, and uniting by organizing the whole working class industrially—not merely those for whom there are jobs, accordingly, not only for those who can pay dues. This unification or organization is essential in order to save the eventual and possible victory from bankruptcy, by enabling the working class to assume and conduct production the moment the guns of the public powers fall into its hands—or before, if need be, if capitalist political chicanery pollutes the ballot box.”—pp. 26–34.

Mr. Hunter says:

“De Leon does not recognize any antagonism between direct and political action.”

Fact:—

In the pamphlet *As to Politics* this passage occurs:

“Of a piece with the court method for the peaceful settlement of disputes, is the political method. The organization that rejects this method and organizes for force only, reads itself out of the pale of civilization,” etc., etc., p. 17.

And this other passage:

“The rejection of political action would throw the I.W.W. back upon the methods of barbarism—physical force exclusively.” p. 41.

Mr. Hunter says:

“Now, the thing that strikes one most in all such talk is that these men have the same limited conception of political action as the Anarchists. To vote is their definition of political action. They call it ‘to stick wads of paper in a box.’ And that certainly seems very tame indeed compared with riots and with massacre. Having accepted the Anarchist’s definition of political action, De Leon and his pupils arrive, as a consequence, at practically the same conclusion as the Anarchists.”

Fact:—

In the same pamphlet *As to Politics* this passage occurs:

“To him in whom such a thought [“the bringing together of an industrial organization . . . without the aid of political agitation”] can find lodgment, the blood spilt in Russia during the last sixteen months is blood wasted—and the error is born of the confusion of ‘political agitation, with the ‘ballot.’{”}—pp. 16–17.

And this other passage:

“The rose on the stalk of ‘political action’ is the posture it enables a man to hold by which he can preach revolution without having to do so underground; in other words, by which he can teach the economics and sociology of the Social Revolution in the open, where the masses can hear; and not in the dark, where but few can meet. The nomination of tickets, together with all the routine that thereby hangs, is but an incidental,” etc.—pp. 22–23.

And this other passage:

“The array of items that foot up eighteen million child, woman, foreigner, Negro, floating, and otherwise disfranchised wage workers, by no means warrants the conclusion that they ‘can in no manner be directly interested in politics.’ Far from it. The conclusion reveals one of the false notions that dominate the anti-political action mind. That mind can not disengage itself from the notion that political action begins and ends with conventions, nominations of tickets, and voting. This is false. Political action, conducted by revolutionists, consists in something else besides those acts; it consists in something else infinitely more important than any or all of those acts; It consists in revolutionary agitation and education upon the civilized plane that presupposes a peaceful trial of strength; that is, settlement of the dispute. . . . Though they [women, children, and otherwise disfranchised workers] be not entitled to cast a single vote, they can distribute literature,” etc., etc.—pp. 49–50.

Finally, Mr. Hunter says:

“In a report that De Leon submitted to that Congress [Amsterdam, 1904] it is said that ‘it is only by the use of their political power that the working class can abolish capitalist class rule and privilege.’”

—Fact:

That report—reproduced elsewhere in this issue in full, as timely in many respects,—gives Mr. Hunter the “lie direct.” No such passage, or anything like it, occurs in the report as claimed, within express quotation marks, by Mr. Hunter. The

quotation is an unqualified falsification.

Paraphrasing the elegant passage in which Stevenson sketches the ignoble profile and anatomy of John Bull, we may close the above review with the observation that Mr. Robert Hunter has given us an opportunity of studying the Socialist party politician, as one may say, stuffed naked—his bourgeois shallowness, his ignorance, his bourgeois presumption and assumption, his perfidy of the back-stairs, his purse-proud contempt for the intelligence of his hearers and readers, his mendacity, all swelled to the superlative—such as was well worth the disgust of handling such a specimen.

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