

Daniel De Leon

*Selected Editorials
On 'Labor Parties'*

Foreword

Labor parties once were such frequent and predictable occurrences on the American political scene that Daniel De Leon could quip that their appearance was “a more unerring method” for determining the approach of elections than the calendar.

The “labor parties” De Leon had in mind were not organized by workers seeking to advance their own interests by means of independent political action. Most were nothing more than attempts by union bosses in some town or city to use the “labor vote”—a vote they rarely controlled—to manipulate the vote-catching worries of major party politicians for their own opportunistic purposes. They were artificial schemes set in motion by various trade union leaders to “pluck ‘an honest penny’ or two by a grand bluff, and a still grander political sellout.” Rank-and-file participation was rarely spontaneous and often coerced, in much the same way that unions would fine members for failing to march in the annual Labor Day parade.

De Leon once described the interest union bosses have in politics as follows:

“The labor fakir who deals in politics is, in this matter as in several other matters, much like the commercial shark who makes a specialty of starting in business so that he can be bought out. He seeks to levy tribute from those who are already in the business of piracy. He is like the smaller fry who follow in the wake of the recognized genius in the art of stealing, and who either threatens to place obstacles in his way unless they are bought off, or who content themselves with picking up what he leaves, or with what he throws at them.

“The labor fakir in politics partakes somewhat also of the political tout. He scurries the field, and gives ‘tips’ for a consideration, or he tells large stories of being able to fix the starters. From this he expects that he will gain what he could not gain were he to enter the field himself, and fight his own battle.”

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The justice of this assessment is part what this selection of De Leon editorials is meant to prove. It is also meant to show that any “labor party” that is not a socialist party is not a party of labor at all, no matter what its pretensions. Any political party that claims to speak for the workers, but is not based on the class struggle, fails to grasp that workers and capitalists have opposing and irreconcilable class interests, and aspires only to establish “safe relations” between those irreconcilable interests, is utopian at best, and at worst nothing but a scheme to funnel working-class discontent down a political blind alley.

Though “labor parties” do not recur today with the same regularity as they once did, the phenomenon is of much more than historic interest.

For a number of years, a group calling itself Labor Party Advocates (LPA) worked to set up a new “Labor Party.” The prime mover in the LPA was Tony Mazzocchi, former secretary-treasurer of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union. Bob Wages, president of the OCAW, and officials of several other AFL-CIO-affiliated unions also were involved.

The LPA’s efforts came to fruition in June 1996 when more than 1,300 delegates from various union locals around the country gathered in Cleveland to organize this new “Labor Party” at a four-day founding convention. According to *Labor Notes*, “It was the first time a labor party had been placed on the agenda of the labor movement since the late 1940s.”

What this “Labor Party” is, what it aims to accomplish and how it plans to accomplish it was the subject of some speculation among “liberals” and “radicals” who had been anticipating what took place in Cleveland for some time. When the convention was over, it had adopted a 16-plank program—“A Call for Economic Justice”—which L.M. Sixel of the *Houston Chronicle* somewhat derisively, but with reasonable accuracy, summarized as follows:

“The party’s platform would warm nearly any working stiff’s heart: the right to a living wage of at least \$10 an hour, a constitutional right to a job, at least four weeks’ vacation, three months of

paid family leave, a 32-hour week, free admission to universities and technical schools, and government-run health care like Canada has. The party also seeks to end ‘corporate welfare’ such as tax breaks and subsidies. And companies that lay off workers would have to pay two months of severance for every year of service.”

Friendlier but still skeptical eyes—such as those of *The Nation’s* Alexander Cockburn—suggested that the real program of the new “Labor Party” was not the “Call for Economic Justice” adopted at Cleveland, and that its purpose had less to do with the “need to recreate a working-class struggle” that Mazzocchi, according to Sixel, called for than it did with AFL-CIO and Democratic Party infighting.

Indeed, one of the most controversial decisions made at the Cleveland convention was that the “Labor Party” would not field its own slate of candidates for public office for at least two years, when, at a second convention, it was supposed to take stock and reevaluate the situation. In the meantime the sensibilities of labor union bosses and “friendly politicians” tangled up with the Democratic and Republican parties were not to be disturbed. According to *Labor Notes*, “a big chunk of members are far from ready to give up on the Democrats. A motion from the floor to ban endorsements of Democrats or Republicans was defeated overwhelmingly.” In truth, however, the only reason this question was the subject of such acrimonious debate on the convention floor was that another “big chunk of members” felt differently. In the end it was the leaders’ ties to, and not the members’ disenchantment with, the anything but “working-class struggle” parties of capitalism that won the day. As *Labor Notes* reported in reference to an official of the American Federation of Government Employees:

“Martin Dunleavy, AFGE’s political director, points out that both he and AFGE President John Sturdivant are members of the Democratic National Committee—and he sees no contradiction there. ‘The points where I will see a contradiction has to do with the endorsement of candidates, especially if that endorsement means the acceptance of exclusively [i.e., endorsing only Labor candidates],’ said Dunleavy.”

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Labor Notes was even more explicit about this when it added that, “The leadership [of the ‘Labor Party’]...feels that the key to growth is the affiliation of local and national unions. It worries that members of the chapters are sometimes unrealistic, and can’t mobilize the resources needed to sustain the organization.”

It was this skepticism that prompted Cockburn to ask:

“So, bottom line, what is the Labor Party?...

“...Questions of the party’s nature, its base and its aims were as unresolved on Sunday as they had been four days earlier....Maybe the Labor Party is nothing much more than a bid by Wages and the OCAW to build some back-up muscle for the union and its allies as a ‘progressive’ pressure group inside the AFL-CIO.

“This may be all very well for politicking in the councils of Big Labor, but where does it leave all those people hungry for alternatives and a radical strategy?”

The question answers itself: It leaves workers who instinctively understand the need for a party that truly represents their interests at the mercy of “friendly” politicians and union bureaucrats whose “friendship” is largely responsible for the predicament they find themselves in today.

Regardless of what eventually becomes of this new “Labor Party,” it seems likely that the “labor party” phenomenon itself will become a regular feature of American politics again because of the baneful impact that modern technological advances are having on American workers. It is unimaginable that these changes, and the social dislocations they bring, can continue without a reaction of some sort on the political field. The only question is what that reaction will be, and whether it will be only another plaything in the hands of opportunistic politicians and labor union leaders, or a true expression of the political and social aspirations of a working class at last fully conscious of its own interests.

While labor parties are of more than historic interest, their history—the record of their experience—cannot be safely ignored.

Labor parties in American politics date from the 1820s, which is to say from the beginning of the country's advance from a predominately agricultural economy to an industrial one. That transformation took decades to complete. As new technologies and means of production developed to replace hand-held and other simple tools as the principal implements of production, individual agricultural and handicraft labor was replaced by machine and factory work requiring the cooperative labor of many workers gathered in centralized locations.

Step by step with this change another change inevitably took place. As the economic foundations on which early American social relations were based were eaten away, new social relations began to take shape. Although the development of new technologies is an ongoing one that will never stop, the *social* revolution that accompanied the industrial revolution of the 1800s was virtually complete by the turn of the century. This social revolution was marked by new relations of production reflected in the growth of new classes—the capitalist and working classes—still in place today. These changes had a profound impact on the way people thought and acted, but the change was a gradual one.

Early 19th-century wage workers disliked capitalism intently. However, they looked backward rather than forward for relief from the exploitation, long hours, bad pay and congested city life they found so abhorrent. Hence, it is not surprising that reform schemes—particularly land and monetary reform schemes—dominated the thinking of early American labor parties. The reason early labor parties adopted these and similar reform planks for their platforms is clear. Most workers of the time were barely removed from the farm. Many had owned their own land and aimed to get it back, or to start their own businesses. Few ever reconciled themselves to their new social status as “hired hands,” and fewer yet accepted it as an irreversible fact of life under advancing capitalism. Their social consciousness lagged far behind the new social reality.

By the end of the 19th century, however, a new generation reconciled to holding a job and earning wages as a way of life became the norm, and so it is down to this day. While some workers may still think of earning and saving enough to start their own businesses, most think

of improving their lives in terms of holding down a “good-paying job” until they retire.

This, however, is the modern equivalent of what 19th-century workers thought was possible when they yearned to return to being independent farmers and craftsmen. The parallel is not exact, of course, if only because workers never enjoyed anything similar to the economic independence of their preindustrial ancestors. The idea being circulated by the mass media that there was once a “golden age” of capitalism when workers enjoyed economic security currently is a myth, the only purpose of which is to focus working-class attention in the wrong direction.

The capitalism of today is no different from the capitalism that repelled 19th-century workers. By the time they began to organize “labor parties,” their land and monetary reform ideas were no longer relevant to their own interests. They were relevant only to the small capitalists of the period, who were being squeezed by bigger ones. Populism, for example, was a 19th-century movement of small capitalists—mostly farmers—who resented the growth and power of large-scale capitalism. However, the Populist Party of the 1890s tried to convince American workers that one set of capitalist interests—their own—and the interests of the working class were identical. In truth, the populist movement’s efforts to draw in the working class were purely opportunistic. That movement had no more interest in emancipating the workers from the clutches of “big business” than they had in freeing workers from the clutches of “small business.”

Workers of the 1890s had nothing to gain by looking backwards. They were susceptible to reform schemes having nothing to do with their interests, in part at least, because their social consciousness lagged behind reality. Workers in the 1990s cannot afford to make the same mistake. Rather than looking backward, they need to look forward. Today that can mean only one thing.

Today, when new technological advances again are revolutionizing the way in which the production and distribution of goods and services are carried on, our social institutions remain stuck where they were in the 1820s and 1890s. Capitalism is a system under which *ownership* of

the means of producing wealth remains essentially what it was when the steam engine and the cotton gin were on the “cutting edge” of modern technology. Private ownership made sense then because it served progress and filled social needs. Today, however, it is as outmoded as the old machines that computers and robotics are replacing. These new advances are not making life better, but worse—not because they are modern, but because they are used to serve the profit interests of their owners and not the interests of society as a whole.

Bringing social institutions into line with modern production is what a true labor party must aim for. That means, and can only mean, collective ownership of the industries and services, but on a foundation that guarantees that they will be democratically operated, managed and controlled by the working-class majority of the population.

American workers need a political party of their own. They need a labor party that is not a party of union bosses, politicians and other hangers-on and beneficiaries of the capitalist system. They need a party that acknowledges the class struggle as a fact, not one that alludes to it merely for rhetorical effect. However, they do not need to start from scratch to organize one, for one has been in the field for many years and it has a program—the Socialist Industrial Union program—that answers all the needs and all the aspirations of workers that “no politicking in the councils of Big Labor,” or in the twin parties of capitalism, can answer. That party is the Socialist Labor Party.

ROBERT BILLS

September 1996

A 'Labor' Party

(The People, January 14, 1894)

The woods are full of rumors and of resolutions long as tapeworms favoring a "labor" party.

It is timely at such seasons to consider what a "labor" party may or may not mean; what it may or may not accomplish.

If a party of "labor" is set up upon the identical economic principles of the pure and simple trade union, it will not differ materially from any middle-class party, and, just the same as all middle-class parties are bound to go down, and for the same reason that the nonpolitical pure and simple trade union could not stand, such a "labor" party, even if it were at all a possibility, would founder as soon as launched.

The reason why a middle-class party cannot stand is that it admits the basic principles upon which its adversary stands but denies the logical conclusions the adversary draws. Take the farmer's or Populist Party, for instance: It is up in arms against monopoly, as it calls concentrated private capital, but it not only does not strive to abolish, on the contrary, it strives to perpetuate the private ownership of capital from which monopoly inevitably springs; it objects to the ultimate effects of private ownership in the means of production, but it strives to uphold the system of private ownership and approves of its immediate effects. A movement or party thus poised will be caught in endless contradictions, will find itself so entangled in its own meshes that it will stumble and finally fall to pieces.

The reasons why the pure and simple trade union cannot hold out are similar. The pure and simple trade union, any more than a middle-class party, does not realize that the existing system is at fault and must be revolutionized. Like middle-class parties, pure and simple trade unions strive to establish a manner of living within the framework of capitalism itself. Now, then, capitalism eats up the ground from under the pure and simple union; it displaces men and throws them into

idleness; it eliminates skill from labor; and by all these things renders it impossible for the union to hold together or absorb a sufficient number of workers to do its work. The pure and simple union grants the principle of private ownership in the means of production; it grants the right of the possessors of these means to keep their profits; it talks about fair and legitimate profits; and it is satisfied with wages. In other words, it has no inkling of the fact that all wealth comes from labor; that wages are only a part of the workman's own product; that all "profit" pocketed by the capitalist is illegitimate and a theft; that the capital in the possession of the capitalist is accumulated profits, or thefts from the workers; that the system under which wages and profits exist is one that tends to increase the latter and reduce the former; and that by the very law of its existence, so long as it exists, the permanence of the pure and simple union is rendered impossible. An uninterrupted line of experience has recently demonstrated the utter incapacity of the pure and simple trade union to carry out its program. If then, the nonpolitical pure and simple trade union and the middle-class parties are marked Ichabod, a combination that should join the two fatal features of the middle-class party and of the pure and simple trade union is not simply marked, but tattooed all over with "Ichabod."

Political parties, whatever their denominations, are reflexes of economic interests. No political party can exist without unity of economic interests. For this reason, there are at this stage of the social evolution only two sets of parties possible: the party of the capitalist and the party of the proletariat. The party of the capitalists—i.e., of the monopolists—is now forming out of the monopolistic interests in the Democratic and Republican parties; the only party that can face such a political combination with prospects of success is the party of the proletariat, i.e., of the class that is bereft of the means whereby to live and that has the requisite vigor of character to refuse to live under conditions of vassalage to others. Such a party cannot have the economic platform of the "pure and simple" trades and unions, it is bound to demand the full return of the labor of the workers, in other words, it cannot escape demanding the collective ownership of all the means of production, i.e., the Socialist or Cooperative Commonwealth. And finally

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such a party would be too clearheaded to imagine it could conceal its socialism by giving itself a colorless name, and it would be too self-respecting to indulge in the devices of cowards. Here, as elsewhere, the future party of labor that will not flicker upward and die, but that will burn with steady, increasing glow until it has lighted the people's feet to victory, will be and can be none other than the Socialist Labor Party—the American wing of the world's social democracy.

Many a curious yahoo, discredited riff-raff, flotsam and jetsam of the American labor movement, who with empty head and corrupt breast has been sponging a living out of his fellows, who at heart feels that the movement of labor is after all too big a thing for his pigmy mind to grasp, and who feels the strong undertow of socialism and fears for his little crumbs and little jobs, is now anxiously booming the thought of a “labor” party “that shall not be socialistic.”

But the Socialist Movement of labor will proceed serenely, taking as little notice of these flies in the air as the steam engine that does not even know of, or hear, the crunching under its wheels of the bones of the fools who thought to impede or stop its course.

The San Francisco Dromios

(Daily People, October 29, 1901)

The municipal contest of this year in San Francisco has produced a by-play that, by all means, should be mounted on the political stage of the country. It should be named "The San Francisco Dromios." While the old parties are carrying on their regulation fray, there is going on, in a corner, a "fierce contest." It is the contest of the "Kangaroo Socialist" Party and a "Union Labor" Party that has just sprung up, life having been breathed into its nostrils by the "endorsement of a large number of unions." These two parties are the Dromios. They can't tell each other apart; nor can anybody else. In their utter Dromio likeness, while trying to lambaste each other they are lambasting themselves in a way that makes the fur fly. And herein lies the instructiveness of the spectacle.

Leading men in the "Union Labor" Party are gentlemen who earned considerable distinction as organizers of Republican clubs; leading men in the "Kangaroo Socialist" Party are gentlemen who have earned considerable distinction as beggars and accepters of political jobs from capitalist parties. No two political faces can be more alike; if they are not "like two peas," still they surely are alike enough to be mistaken for each other.

No doubt it is a crime for men claiming to be in and of the camp of labor to organize political bodies of a party that fleeces the workingman. The crime consists in aiding and abetting the fleecing. And the fleecing is aided and abetted because such conduct tends to obliterate and has the direct effect of obliterating the line that separates the working from the fleecing class. With the obliteration of that line the workers fall an easy prey to the thousand and one lures that capitalist politics holds out to switch their fleeced workingmen from the direct forthright.

But for the identical reason, it is likewise a crime for men claiming to be in and of the camp of labor to beg and accept political jobs from a party that fleeces the workers. The crime consists there too in aiding

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and abetting the fleecing. And there too the fleecing is aided and abetted because such conduct positively blurs the line of demarcation between the workingman and his fleecer. With the blurring of that line the workers cannot escape falling a prey to the insidious lures which capitalist politics holds out to labor's undoing.

Both acts are crimes; both acts are reducible to "corruption"; both acts spring from self-seeking minds that try to ride the labor vote; both acts redound to the direct injury of the working class.

While at this extremity of the country, here in New York, the spectacle is seen of two capitalist Dromios—the Tammany and the Republican parties—exposing and condemning each other, and proving each other's unfitness to represent the people, at the other extremity, in San Francisco, the spectacle is seen of two lackeys-of-capitalism Dromios—the Kangaroo and the "Union Labor" parties—equally exposing, equally condemning and proving with equal conclusiveness each other's criminality in the camp of labor.

Solidifying the Labor Vote In Labor's Interest

(Daily People, August 18, 1903)

Every year, as election approaches, certain phenomena occur in the political arena with the regularity of clockwork. These phenomena are always the same in character and purpose; yet, despite this, they deceive the unwary and lead to the undoing of men whom experience should have taught to know better. For this reason these phenomena must be dealt with as often as they occur, hence this analysis of them.

Among these phenomena is the old, old one presented by a handful of "labor leaders" who organize an "independent labor party" for the alleged purpose of "solidifying the labor vote in labor's interests."

The modus operandi of these "labor leaders" is very simple. With or without the consent of their unions, and very often with no other basis of representation than that afforded by an organization that exists only on paper, these "labor leaders" get together in some obscure locality and form their "independent labor party." At the first glance it would naturally seem that, being an "independent labor party" the next step of these "labor leaders" would be the nomination of "independent labor" candidates. Such is not the case, however, for these "labor leaders" proceed to declare that their "independent labor party" will "support candidates for office who give a guarantee of fidelity to labor's interests." In other words, the "independent labor party" of these "labor leaders" is but an adjunct to the two capitalist parties, formed for the purpose of destroying if possible the genuine party of labor, the Socialist Labor Party, "by solidifying the labor vote" in the interests of capital and not in the interests of labor.

That this conclusion is true, an examination of the personality of these "labor leaders" and the results of their "independent labor party" will prove. They are mainly petty politicians, and are either duly-rewarded hangers-on of the capitalist parties, or disappointed officeseek-

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ers, who start “independent” movements for the purpose of forcing recognition in the distribution of patronage. They are more bent on securing appointments than they are in advancing the interests of labor. In this many of them succeed. As a result of the formation of their “independent labor party,” the coveted appointment is secured by one of these “labor leaders,” often to the bitter disappointment of the others, who “squeal” and expose the scheme, or else revive it for their own benefit at the next election.

After the above analysis it becomes apparent that there is only one way of truly solidifying the labor vote in the interests of labor, and that is by organizing the working class economically and politically according to the classconscious lines advocated by the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance¹ and the Socialist Labor Party. Victory will then no longer perch on capital’s brow, but will grace that of labor.

¹The Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance was established in December 1895. It proceeded from the principle that only the total overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of socialism could settle the irrepressible conflict that raged under capitalism between the capitalist class and the working class. The Socialist Labor Party, at its national convention in July 1896, endorsed the ST&LA and hailed it “as a giant stride forward throwing off the yoke of wage slavery and of the robber class of capitalists.” In 1905, the ST&LA was merged into the Industrial Workers of the World.

All Hail, ST&LA Convention!

(*Daily People*, December 8, 1903)

It does not frequently happen that supplementary events occur simultaneously to enable the watcher to see the other by. If that is rare, still rarer is the coincidence of a third event to see both the others by, and, seeing, take warning.

The two mutually supplementary events that are now occurring is the mass emigration back home, or anywhither, from this country and from New South Wales. The movement which in this country has sporadically sought to gain headway and succeeded only here and there—the movement of pure and simple trades union politics—speedily ripened into fruit in New South Wales. There the absurd thing of a “labor party” grounded on capitalist economics is a reality. The capitalist world being one city, the genesis of the New South Wales absurdity may be imagined from what goes on in this country.

The trades union is, knowingly or unknowingly, a breath of the class struggle. Knowingly or unknowingly, when the workers gather in such bodies their action is an afflatus of the irrepressible conflict that portends the complete overthrow of the social system grounded on the principle of the plunder of the workers by the idlers, of labor by capital. The peculiar disadvantage of labor in this struggle—as elucidated in the *Two Pages From Roman History*—renders it prone to be switched off the track. Unable to wholly repress the manifestation of the class struggle which consists in the rise of trades unions, the capitalist class seeks to switch it off, and is aided in that by the workers’ poverty and lack of information. The result of the two tendencies—the tendency on the one hand, to organize for the class struggle, and the tendency, on the other hand, to switch the unions off the track—is generally a compromise. The first stage of the compromise is the pure and simple trades union, officered by the labor lieutenants of the capitalist class. This stage is quickly reached in the English-speaking world. The second stage de-

pend upon the “genius” of each country. The genius of New South Wales produced a “labor party” in Parliament, at all points the counterpart of the pure and simple trades union in the shop—both are officered by the labor lieutenants of the capitalist class; both seek to “harmonize the relations of Brother Labor with Brother Capital”; both recognize the “rights of capital”; and both strain to safeguard these rights of the plunderer, while feeling compelled to resist the goad of capitalist exploitation. The position is absurd. It is untenable in the long run. Either the principle of plunder is alone right, and then there is nothing for the wage slave but to submit and become a coolie; or the principle is wrong, and there is nothing for the wage slave but to so direct his conduct that every step he takes is but the deliberate precursor of a next and certain step toward the final overthrow of the plundering capitalist class. The genius of New South Wales brought the absurdity to its acme—that “labor party” of capitalism. By the light of what that leads to—a vast emigration away from the country, and, as the *Australian Globe* asserts, with probable veracity, a marked “decline in the readiness of capital to invest”—may be read the meaning of the vast emigration homeward from this country also. Pure and simple unionism is as barren as a mule.

The third event, enabling both the first two to be still better comprehended, and a sign of promise, withal, is the Eighth National Convention of the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance, now in session in Newark, N.J. Like the pure and simple trades union, the ST&LA is an afflatus of the irrepressible conflict between the capitalist class and the working class. Beyond the oneness of their starting point, the ST&LA and the pure and simple unionism part company. Differently from pure and simple unionism, the ST&LA preserves the direction of its revolutionary birth: it recognizes that the “rights of capital” means the unrighting of labor; it knows that the two are irreconcilable; it knows that the supremacy of the capitalist class means today the steady degradation of the nation; it seeks not for peace where there is no peace; it tolerates no labor lieutenants of capitalism in its midst; it is up to the secret that the labor question is essentially a political one; it labors on the industrial field for the education of the toiler to enable him to overthrow

the system that plunders him. In short, it moves in even step with the Socialist Labor Party.

When this organization shall have acquired the body, bone and sinew of the pure and simple union then, altho' capital will not be ready to "invest," yet labor, that which produces the only element in capital that is worth saving, to wit, the machinery of production, will not take wings. Not self-throttled, as in New South Wales and this country, labor will then stay at home, and freed from the incubus of capitalist exploitation, start and remain free.

All hail, the ST&LA convention at Newark!

Questioning Questioners

(Daily People, August 2, 1906)

The Gompers “independent” “labor” “party” has announced its arrival with a manifesto which declares the “party’s” intention to ask certain questions from the candidates of the dominant parties with a view to endorsing them in localities where the “independent” “labor” “party’s” chances of electing its men are not considered favorable. In all other localities the “independent” “labor” “party” will set up its own choice morsels. People who ask questions should be willing to answer questions put to them. Except in the few districts where lie the Tuxedos, the Euclid Avenues, the Beacon Hills, the Narragansett Piers, the “Lake Fronts,” the Nob Hills, etc., the working-class voters are vastly in the preponderance. Articulating the growing sentiment among this large mass of the people, we propose to put just three questions to the candidates that the “independent” “labor” “party” of the Civic Federation’s first vice president Gompers has foaled.

First Question: Do you consider that the working class and the capitalist class, which grows fat only in proportion as the working class grows lean, are brothers?

Second Question: Do you consider that the capitalist class, whose property is but stolen goods, stolen from the working class; whose “law and order” spells “outrage”; whose “morality” spells “debauchery”; whose “religion” spells “hypocrisy”; whose “patriotism” spells “sellout”; and whose flag is emblazoned with the \$ mark rampant, over the workingman’s skull-and-crossbones couchant—do you consider that that class has any “rights” whose abolition civilization does not demand peremptorily?

Third Question: Do you consider that the capitalist system—under which the workingman is but an article of merchandise, the price of which is regulated in the labor market by the identical law of supply and demand which regulates the price of bales of hay and kegs of pork—

can be mended, or do you hold that it is sooner ended than mended, and should be ended none too soon?

The awakening working-class voters of the land insist in deep base notes upon a categoric answer to these questions. Their wives, bowed down by the cross of capitalist usurpation, their children, robbed of the joys and opportunities of childhood, raise their treble voices and cry—“Answer!”

Plagues or Tares

(Daily People, August 28, 1906)

He who contemplates the visitations from Europe that fall upon the Socialist Movement of America—the Glasgow plan municipalization schemes, the bourgeois radical political upheavals that here assume the shape of pure and simple political socialism, and the imitation British parliamentary laborite movement in the shape of the Gompers political venture—may well be puzzled to determine whether it is a case of the plagues of Egypt over again, or an ordinary case of tares; whether it is that America is so old-Egyptianly sinful as to call scourges upon her head, or whether it is a mere case of tares, that have to be put up with as the inevitable accompaniment of the good things that America imports from Europe. The latest of these plagues or tares is the Gompers “independent” “labor” “party.”

When in France, some six and odd years ago the spectacle was seen of a Millerand, reputed a Socialist, taking a seat in a bourgeois cabinet; when on top of that, a ministerial “bloc,” or parliamentary party was formed out of Socialists and bourgeois; when on top of that top the Socialists of the “bloc” were seen to stick through thick and thin to the cabinet’s acts, to uphold its Chalon and Martinique massacres of workmen, and even to support its bills for the military budget; when such a performance appeared upon the socialist stage there was a veritable commotion through the socialist world. The commotion came to a head at Amsterdam. No more stinging charge could be made against the Millerand element at Amsterdam than the charge that it “supported the military budget,” that it thereby approved of the appropriation of funds whose only purpose was the slaughter of workingmen, abroad or at home, or in both places. The military-budget-supporting Millerandists’ performance has been repeated in the Parliament of Great Britain. A Labor-Socialist-Fabian combination, openly allied with bourgeois politicians, carried some 40 of its candidates triumphantly into

Parliament. One of them, John Burns, was by the grace of the capitalist government, “elevated” to a seat in the cabinet—just as was Millerand; most of the other Laborite members of Parliament disgraced themselves by congratulating the “chosen” one of their class upon his being considered sufficiently tainted to be “chosen”—just as the Millerandists did; and, just as was done by the Millerandists, the Laborite delegation in Parliament stuck so close to the cabinet that supported not only an “education bill” which contemplates the lowering of the school age in the interests of the exploiter who needs child labor, but also *supported the military budget*. The Millerand scandal of France has repeated itself in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

It is such a British echo of French Millerandism that Gompers has re-echoed here in America—at least incipiently. He has launched “by proclamation” his “independent” “labor” “party,” of which may be said what Voltaire said of the “Holy Roman Empire.” The latter was neither “holy” nor “Roman”; the Gompers party is neither “independent” nor “labor.” It matters not whether the Gompers venture will at all points, down to the last, be a repetition in America of the monstrosity witnessed, first in France, and now in the British Parliament, or whether, thanks to matured conditions, the abortion will forthwith go to pieces, as is likely. Sufficient unto the day is the fact that Gompers has proclaimed the British affair his model, and has started, true to his model, by proclaiming his readiness to ally himself with any old thing that promises success, i.e., votes.

Is it a plague or is it tares? Different views may be held according to the viewpoint. Whether plague or tares, it is surcease of mischief, against which the Socialist Movement of the land has to attest its virility by confuting it with argument, and downing with facts.

Transvaal Socialism

(*Daily People*, January 18, 1907)

Under the title “Two Letters” a correspondence will be found elsewhere in this issue between the Independent Labor Party of the Transvaal and the Socialist Labor Party of the United States. In response to a request from the former for funds towards its campaign, one of the main purposes of which is the exclusion of Chinese labor, the latter declines to render aid towards an agitation so anti-Marxian as to tend, instead of uniting the proletariat of all countries, to play into the capitalists’ hand of rupturing the worldwide nation of the proletariat by race distinctions.

The SLP is well aware of the existence of that frame of mind that causes some folks to deny unto others the capacity to utter themselves on any general principle because of lack of intimate knowledge with some detail. In Congress, just now, Sen. Tillman of South Carolina has been disputing the fitness of Northern senators to discuss the question of Negro lynching, seeing those senators do not live in states having a majority of Negroes, and have not, like himself, “lived 59 years among Negroes.” And so there will presumably be folks in the Transvaal who may deny the fitness of the American Socialist Labor Party to express itself upon the Chinese question in the Transvaal, seeing that, neither the party as a body, nor any of its members has resided long enough in the Transvaal to be acquainted with the unspeakable horrors that Chinese labor has introduced there. As in the case of Sen. Tillman and Negro lynching, the attitude of the Transvaal anti-Chinese labor men would neither hold water, nor bear criticism. The SLP of America is fully aware of the revolting, the unprintable practices that have been brought home to the Chinese barracks in the Transvaal. The columns of *Reynolds Newspaper* on the subject are no secret here, nor is the SLP unaware of the stenchful explosion that these revelations produced in Parliament. At the same time, such incidents cannot blur certain general principles, any more than isolated cases of Negro bestiality in

South Carolina can repeal the principle that lynching is mob law, more baneful a practice to society than any individual Negro crime.

Behind the mask of indignation at isolated instances of Negro bestiality, there hides the Southern manufacturer's despot hatred of labor, whom the white exploiter would cow, terrorize and keep in abject submission for his private purposes. So likewise behind the indignation at the revolting practices discovered in the Chinese camps of the Transvaal, there lurks, consciously or unconsciously, the bourgeois-instilled spirit of competition between race and race, creed and creed, nationality and nationality—man and man.

With a loud howl did the Amsterdam International Congress throw out the proposition presented mainly by Socialist Party delegates from America, looking to the establishment of differences in races. That "backward races" resolution was not even allowed to come to a vote at Amsterdam; its sponsors were shamed into withdrawing it; and the delegation of the Socialist Labor Party acted as a unit in joining to put the seal of condemnation upon so inhumanly stupid and stupidly inhuman a proposition. The answer of the SLP of America to the Independent Labor Party of the Transvaal is in line with the action taken by the International Congress of Amsterdam, which the SLP is proud to have contributed in emphasizing through its delegation.

The Labor Party

(Daily People, February 6, 1910)

There is a certain mirror in which the Socialists who oppose a “labor party,” on principle, and those who favor a “labor party,” on principle, should look at their own prospectives. ’Twill cause them to understand themselves better. If at all they have eyes to see, they will be able to detect the cloven hoof held in common by the two notions—and, if they have brains to think, they will quickly take backwater.

Our opposers of a “labor party,” on principle, gather a vast material from American and British “labor parties” to back up their views. They cite the cases in which the K of L carried municipalities only to display the party’s impotence and ineptness; they cite the case of the San Francisco “labor party” whose mayor landed in prison, a convicted boodler; they cite the instances in Great Britain where the “Labor Party” fuses with the Liberals in many a constituency, and where Laborites in Parliament more than once strike attitudes that are essentially bourgeois.

On the other hand, those who favor a “labor party,” on principle, take the witness stand with testimony that is equally unimpeachable. They cite the instance of the Socialist Party in Wisconsin, where, notwithstanding the party numbers several members in the Legislature and boasts of what these accomplish, Wisconsin remains the most backward state in labor legislation for the protection of the worker’s life and limbs; they cite the case of James Carey in Haverhill who voted a \$15,000 armory appropriation, and whose misconduct seems rather to have endeared him to the SP than to have earned the party’s reprobation; they cite the more recent instance of dicker with the capitalist politicians perpetrated by the St. Louis SP, and sanctioned by the party.

Planted upon the first set of facts the antilabor party men pronounce a “labor party” unspeakable; planted, in turn, upon the second set of facts, “unspeakable” is the term that the prolabor party men apply to a political party that is not set up by the unions. He who would

understand the source of such reasoning, and thereby grasp the reason of its defect, should turn to the reasoning of the pure and simple physical fordist and the pure and simple politician against each other.

With a truthfulness that is unimpeachable, as far as it goes, the pure and simple physical fordist convicts pure and simple politicianism of corruption; with a truthfulness, equally unimpeachable, as far as it goes, the pure and simple politician convicts pure and simple physical fordistism likewise of corruption.

What is the feature that the conflict between the pure and simple politician and the pure and simple physical fordist reveals as common to both the disputants? That feature is the crippled mind, unable to hold two thoughts together. In the crippled mind only one thought can find lodgement at a time. The entrance of one thought implies the expulsion of another. Synthesis, the coordination of two or more thoughts, a process without which reasoning is struck with paralysis—that process is an unknown thing to the pure and simple physical fordist and the pure and simple politician alike. In the mind of each only one thought finds room. The thought that, without physical force wherewith to carry out the program which political action agitates, educates and organizes for, political action is an idle pastime—that thought is the sole tenant of the narrow chamber of the pure and simple physical fordist's mind; the thought that, without the agitation, education and organization brought about by political action, physical force never can crystallize to a purpose—that thought crowds out all others from the equally narrow brain cells of the pure and simple politician. The feature of these two opposites is mental lameness—one-legged hobblism. The psychology of these two is the psychology of the anti-“labor party” and the pro-“labor party” exclusivists.

The fatal defects that mark the “labor parties” known in America and the Socialist Party are not defects inherent in either a party organically of, nor in a party not organically of Unions. The fatal defects that mark the two is that, unclear upon the actual goal of the Socialist or Labor Movement, the exclusive pro-“labor partyite” and the exclusive anti-“labor partyite” have taken hold of only a fractional, and have no sense of the four-jointed truth.

The panels of the Socialist Republic, evolution unquestionably establishes, must be the organized useful occupations of the land: the central administrative authority of the Cooperative Commonwealth can consist of none other than the representatives of these organizations. This truth reaches the mind of the exclusive pro-“labor partyite” through the narrow spectacles of his special training. There are in existence only industrial organizations. He concludes from this that none other will, or can, or should exist; hence he arrives at the tactical posture of rejecting all political party that is not strained through the loins of unions.

Again, the Socialist Republic, evolution establishes with equal certainty, means the emancipation of mankind. This truth, in turn, reaches the mind of the exclusive anti-“labor partyite” through the spectacles of his special training. As a rule an “intellectual,” actual or would-be, this species is able to perceive in unionism a thing capable of embracing only a fraction of mankind. Hence he arrives at the tactical posture of rejecting all political party strained through the loins of unions.

The synthesis of the two fractional truths—the truth that the constituencies of the Socialist Republic are bound to be the organized useful occupations, that is, unions; and the truth that the Socialist Republic must be the tocsin of human emancipation—the synthesis of these two truths allows no conclusions other than—

1st. The mission of unionism in the land is to embrace all the people who render useful services to the commonweal—not the manual, or industrial workers only, but those as well whose occupation consists in rendering to society those services which its mental and spiritual aspirations demand;

2nd. The political party fit to serve as the vanguard of the true unionist movement, must be one strained through the loins of that movement itself; the true political party of the revolution cannot choose but be a labor party;

3rd. As the scaffolding of a building precedes the building itself, and, the building once raised, becomes superfluous, a political party, whose agitation centers in and radiates from the principle that its mission is to

call into existence the true unionist movement, such a political party must inevitably precede the formation of true unionism;

4th. Until the true unionist movement has arisen and gathered the strength sufficient to give birth to the labor party, a “labor party” can only be an abortion for the identical reason that anti-“labor partyism” is an abortion today—the latter, as well as the former, being the spawn of truths so fractional that they are robust untruths, hence inevitably corrupt, neither having anything to twit the other with.

A Labor Party?

(Daily People, March 2, 1910)

From Albion College, Albion, Mich., the request comes for information upon six questions regarding a labor party. The questions are hereby stated, with the answers thereto:

1st. Do you think the plan of an independent labor party feasible and timely? Why?—Wherever there is a proletariat, and the suffrage is free there the broad conditions exist to render a labor party feasible and timely. The economic conditions that compel the proletariat to organize into unions have their supplementary political conditions that likewise point to the necessity of organization into a party. Where either organization is wanting the other must needs be imperfect and inefficient.

2nd. Do you think classconsciousness is sufficiently developed among the laboring people to cause them to support an independent party?—Not all the efforts, through mystification and other processes, to dig the brains out of the proletariat and render them as abject as the Climacidae, those women in Syria of whom Plutarch tells that they were trained to squat on all fours as footstools and stepladders for their mistresses, or to render them besotted and cruel enough patiently to submit to indignity on earth in exchange for the delight, after earth, of reclining over the balustrades of heaven and beholding those who plundered them on earth sizzling in hell fire—not all the processes put in practice to this end have been aught but dismal failures. Those who succumb are the exception: with the majority the spring of their humanity never is snapped. Superficially looked upon, classconsciousness is absent from the American proletariat. Appearances are mainly that way. The appearance is a thin crust of ice. It has been amply tested: address a crowd of proletarians gathered at random, and the language of their class interests quickly breaks through the ice. The proof of this is amply furnished by the National Civic Federation in the effort of its lay and clerical capitalist agencies to raise the wall of their labor lieutenants between the rank and file and the word of classconsciousness.

3rd. Do you think strikes and boycotts are still potent factors and strong weapons in the hands of labor?—The strike and the boycott have not lost their edge. On the contrary. These weapons have increased in potential power, a potential power that will become actual soon as both the striking arm of labor is freed from the artificial bonds, such as “contracts,” etc., that tie it down, and the political organization of labor supplements its economic formation—two consummations that, tho’ they may be delayed, are inevitable.

4th. Do you think the present trades union methods sufficient to advance the best interests of American labor?—No, for the reasons set forth under 1 and 3.

5th. Would you advise independent political action by the laboring people?—Yes, giving, of course, the word “independent” its full significance in this connection, that is, “unfettered by bourgeois notions.”

6th. What do you think is the ultimate plan for the solution of our labor problem?—If by “plan” is meant the “goal,” then the solution is the Socialist, or Industrial Republic. If by “plan” is meant the “means,” then, the unification of the proletariat upon the economic field (without which their independent political action would be derailed) and their unification upon the political field (without which their economic unity could not recruit and drill its forces).

Gompers' Labor Party

(Daily People, May 15, 1910)

After having tentatively let out the news from Washington that his Executive Committee has decided to launch a "labor party," Mr. Gompers has been silent on the subject. Not, however, inactive. The gentleman's hand has been since plainly visible in several parts of the country where AF of L unions, alone in some places, jointly, in others, with farmers' organizations, or their spokesmen, have been holding public meetings, winking at politics and resolving.

All this time Mr. Gompers has spoken not a word. Like Paddy's owl, he may have made up with thinking for what he failed to produce in words.

If Mr. Gompers has, indeed, been doing some thinking he must have reasoned as follows:

"I used to say, in the days when I held that the economic functions, pure and simple, were all sufficient to protect the workers and promote their interests—I used to say in those days: 'Let all come in; Democrats, Republicans, Socialists, Single Taxers, anarchists—come, all of ye, into the AF of L.' My notion then was that, if I could only gather all the workers into my fold, we could then do what we willed. What we willed!? Aye, that's the rub! What did we 'will'? There were as many 'wills' as there were isms gathered in my fold. Sometimes it looked as if there were as many isms as there were duespayers. Alack the day! This thing of 'coming together' is not a one-sided affair. There are more sides to it than to a snake a-wriggling. Cats and dogs also may 'come together,' but they don't stay so long; only so long as they are in each other's wool. No; 'coming together' is no solution; at least not the first step to the solution. How will that labor party of mine look? It would be made up of 'come-togethers.' Lord! Lord! Have mercy upon me, miserable sinner. Let me not be around when the 'come-togethers' get together. No; the dragnet policy will not substitute mental drill. I see it

among my pets, the Socialist Party folksies. They have come together to kick one another to pieces. *No*; the thing to do is first to drill the minds up to a minimum. Then bring them together. Then they will stick. And there is where I'm at the end of my song. How can *I* do any drilling? The moment I were to start drilling I would make enemies—enemies, more enemies—still more enemies! That won't pay. The levelheaded thing to do is to be everybody's friend—except of course a friend of that crying abomination, the Socialist Labor Party, whose dart is in the hide of every foe it has. No, Samuel, go slow. You've had and are having quite enough experience with the 'come-togethers' on the economic field, without you look for more trouble on the political field also. Go slow, Sam; Sammy, keep your trap shut."

And Mr. Gompers' labor party remains at the resolving stage.

Please report errors to

**Socialist Labor Party of America
P.O. Box 218,
Mountain View, CA 94042-0218
USA**

fax: 408-280-6964

www.slp.org — socialists@slp.org