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EDITORIAL

## AS TO THE PREAMBLE OF THE TRAUTMANN-ST. JOHN-AXELSON CONCERN.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**T**HE Hungarian Socialist Paper *Nepakarat*, dated November 16, contains a translation into Hungarian of a letter of which the below is the original:

New York, November 10, 1908.

Chas. Rothfiser,

Editor *Nepakarat*.

Dear Comrade:—

Obedient to your request that I answer the German letter, addressed to you under date of last October 29, by Wm. E. Trautmann, and which you inform me appeared in a Hungarian translation in the *Nepakarat*, I have this to say:

I read the nearly five-page closely typewritten letter of Trautmann's. Were it not that I know that the late convention of the I.W.W. amended the old Preamble of the I.W.W. by striking out the "political clause," I would have found it difficult to detect just what Trautmann was driving at—so confused and wordy is his letter. It is next to impossible to grapple with a spook. Knowing, however, what the I.W.W. convention did, I have been able to make a guess at what Trautmann's purpose is. His purpose is not to explain, or justify the action of the convention in adopting a "new preamble" with the "political clause" stricken out; his purpose is to run away from the real issue—"What was the purpose of striking out the political clause?"—and to escape the issue by obscuring it with declamation. Wherever reason fails, declamation is resorted to.

The issue is plain.

There is a principle in the interpretation of amended documents to the effect that a word, or a clause, acquires significance according as it is stuck into, or

stricken out of, the amended document. If the original preamble of the I.W.W. had not had a “political clause” the omission might have been an accident, an oversight. It so happens, however, that the original preamble of the I.W.W. contained a very explicit political clause, to wit, a declaration of the necessity to “unite the workers upon the POLITICAL as well as the industrial field.” That clause has been STRICKEN OUT of the new preamble. This fact proves that the absence of the “political clause” in the new preamble is not an oversight, is not an accident. It proves that the absence of the clause is INTENTIONAL.

What was the intent?

There is a second principle in the interpretation of amended documents. It is this: The intent of an amendment—of the sticking in, or the striking out of a word, or clause—is to be gathered from the history that surrounds such amendment. The history that surrounds the amendment in this case is glaring.

The first assault against the “political clause” was made at the second convention of the I.W.W. The assault was led by the Anarchists, conspicuous among them a Chicago Anarchist named Moore. They would not listen to “political action”; the ballot was repudiated as the “capitalist ballot.” (See stenographic report, Convention of 1906.)

The second assault against the “political clause” was made at the very next convention, 1907. Again the assault was led by two Anarchists—Camanita, an Italian Anarchist from Paterson, N.J., who, as frequently happens with people of that ilk, has since run away from Paterson refusing to face the consequences of his own insane rantings, and leaving his men in the lurch; and Axelson, a Scandinavian Anarchist from Minneapolis. Again the ballot was denounced and pure and simple physical force glorified. (See stenographic report, Convention of 1907.)

The third and last assault, made at this year’s convention against the “political clause,” was again led by the same Anarchist, Axelson of last year. The “new preamble,” with the political clause struck out, is his work. He reported it. Speaking in favor of his proposition to cut out the “political clause” he said: “Tear out the little hook in the preamble ‘you must unite on the political field.’ We are accused of cowardice that we are afraid to cut that out . . . show me where political action has accrued to the benefit of and where it can benefit the working class.” Similar

Anarchist language was held by others; these views prevailed; the “political clause” was stricken out, and the “new preamble” adopted. (See minutes of the sixth day’s session, at the convention with Trautmann’s signature attached.)

Such is the history that accompanied the “new preamble.”

Applying the above-cited two principles of the interpretation of amended documents to the facts in the case, the conclusion cannot be escaped that the striking out of the “political clause” is a DELIBERATE REPUDIATION of the civilized method of social conflicts—political action. The conclusion cannot be escaped that the striking out of the “political clause” places the Trautmann-St. John-Axelson concern upon that low and backward level of civilization that ignores, shuts its eyes to and repudiates the experience painfully made by the Labor Movement, and worships its own vicious conceitedness. The conclusion cannot be escaped that such an organization—if such a thing can at all be called an organization—dissolves all the bonds of reason, truthfulness and integrity which hold society together. No wonder that in the *Industrial Bulletin* of last October 11, St. John’s name appears (bottom of last column, page 2) as “General Secretary” and in the same issue (first page) Trautmann’s name appears as “General Secretary-Treasurer”; no wonder that in this very letter to you, dated October 29, he signs himself again “General-Sekretær-Schatzmeister” (General Secretary Treasurer) while in the *Industrial Bulletin* of only five days earlier, October 24, St. John’s signature again appears (last column of page 2) as “General Secretary”; no wonder that at the convention petty theft, practiced by individuals against individual capitalists, was lauded as the legitimate interpretation of the program of the proletariat to expropriate the Capitalist Class, and the laudation was cheered to the echo! Anarchy is not bomb-throwing alone: Anarchy is the negation of sense and reason—with disaster for the Working Class.

In justice to what I take to be the spirit of your request for an answer from me I do not feel that I can close this letter without some concise statement of the Marxian position concerning Unionism.

A pure and-simple reactionary Union may ignore and even repudiate “political action” without reading itself out of the pale of civilization. Its program does not contemplate a social revolution. An organization, however, which like the

Trautmann-St. John-Axelson concern expressly demands for the working class the “taking possession of the earth and the machinery of production,” such an organization reads itself out of the pale of civilization if it repudiates political action—the weapon without which a revolution cannot be successfully preached in our days; a necessary shield behind which to recruit and drill the all-sufficient and the only physical force available to the working class. The physical force available to the revolutionary proletariat is not military or destructive, it is the integral, that is, the industrially organized class-conscious Union. The Marxian position is no one-legged hobby, either “pure and simple ballotism or pure and simple bombism.” The Marxian position was jointly held by the delegates of the Socialist Labor Party and the I.W.W. in the resolution which they jointly presented at the Stuttgart International Congress. The resolution is summed up in the following two paragraphs:

“The bona-fide, or revolutionary Socialist Movement needs the political as well as the economic organization of Labor, the former for propaganda and warfare upon a civilized plane of the ballot, the latter as the only conceivable physical force with which to back up the ballot, without which force all ballot is moonshine, and which force is essential for the ultimate lock-out of the capitalist class.

“Without the political organization, the Labor or Socialist Movement could not reach its triumph; without the economic, the day of its political triumph would be the day of its defeat. Without the economic organization, the movement would attract and breed the pure and simple politician, who would debauch and sell out the working class; without the political organization, the movement would attract and breed the agent provocateur, who would assassinate the movement.”

The fragment left in the Trautmann-St. John-Axelson concern is not the I.W.W. What is left there is an ugly changeling with all the ugly ear-marks of Anarchy sticking out all over it.

Fraternally,

DANIEL DE LEON.

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Since the above letter was written, the so-called *Industrial Bulletin*, dated the 7th, but appearing a week later, has been published. It contains the transactions of

the Sixth Day of the late convention where the Preamble was amended. It confirms at all points the statements made above as to the part taken by the Anarchist Axelson in striking out the “political clause,” and goes even further. It underscores the passage of Axelson’s speech, quoted in the above letter, and in which he challenges any one to “show where political action has accrued to the benefit and where it can benefit the working class.” This issue of the *Bulletin* also quotes Cole, a member of the G.E.B., as also stating “he could not see whether political action had brought any benefit to the workers.”

For the sake of completeness, elsewhere in this issue will be found the letter written by Trautmann to *Nepakarati* in as faithful an English translation as the confused thought and mushy language of the original allows.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Appended, next page.—R.B.]

## TRAUTMANN'S LETTER OF "CLARIFICATION" TO THE EDITOR OF "NEPAKARAT"

Chicago, October 29th, 1908.

Editor of *Nepakarat*,  
516 East 6th Street,  
New York City.

Dear Comrade:

Upon advice of Frank Bohn I write you these few lines. I do so more for the sake of clarifying the situation than for the sake of inducing you to arrive at conclusions in your opinions that might bring you into conflict with your position as the Editor of a party paper.

One of the principal objections raised against the work of the last convention of the Industrial Workers of the World is that the amendment of the Preamble amounts to a repudiation of all political action on the part of the proletariat. This may seem so to all those who did not witness the convention. Nothing is more erroneous than such a conclusion.

The amendment aims first of all to put an end to a state of confusion. Confusion must be removed. First of all, the amendments are fully in accord with the principles expressed by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*, and portions of the amendments are taken from the pamphlet *Value, Price and Profit*. Until now the preamble declared that the workers must organize politically as well as economically. The amendment declares that the workers must organize as a "class." In their class-groupings the workers may unite upon two fields—the political and the economic. With regard to the merit of the political party-grouping there exist conflicting opinions of such unbridgeable nature that it requires a process of many years of disintegration and reconstruction before clearness and class-consciousness can be reached. This process, necessary though it is, must take its course unhindered by other influences which have no touch with the political field. The process may be quickened, but only then when the workers are organized in a militant economic organization as a "class," instead of divided and fighting one another in order to prepare themselves therein for their historic mission. The mixing with the labor of upbuilding the economic organization on the part of political groupings or their partisans must work harmfully as, sad to say, we were made to experience during the last two years—two years during which the followers of the two parties in existence did all in their power to render the economic organization subservient to their particular objects.

More and more did it become clear that these harmful influences, these confusion-breeding conditions had to be made an end of. The economic organization, embracing all revolutionary elements of the working class, regardless of their party-grouping, has other functions to fill than those of political parties which have to submit themselves to existing political conditions; while, on the contrary, the economic organization draws its life-force from the process of the economic development and the permanent process of change among the implements of production. It is in this process that the change in the economic situation reveals the political grouping of the social elements which corresponds to the changed economic situation.

The declaration in the Preamble that the workers must organize themselves as a class, by no means excludes the idea they may organize also in political-party groupings of their own class. But, as already stated, the party groupings are primarily dependent upon the processes of economic development—when, accordingly, political action, that is, ballot-box action, becomes necessary. Personally I do not at all deny that. But then the political action must not be only a sham fight, as has often been maintained, a sort of manœuvre, which requires the physical support of a non-political organization in order to be at all effective, but the political action must then be in reality “action,” to the end of attaining a special object. To these ends a separate political organization is needed, one that, uninfluenced by and distinct from the economic, exercises its special functions within capitalist society. There may be a class-struggle organization upon the political field, but never will it be an organization of the “working class,” seeing that other elements, which, owing to material conditions, do not belong to the proletariat, are drawn into it, and weaken the class-character of the organization, aye, at times may destroy it. As a class, the proletariat can organize itself only upon the economic field. As a class, in such an organization, the proletariat can, without concerning itself about the consequences of a political constellation, work to the end of awakening self-consciousness among the workers, and to educate them into class-conscious combatants, who, aware of the power possessed by capitalist society, will set in play ALL practical and available means upon the economic and the political field, in order to carry out and fight to a finish for emancipation from the yoke of wage slavery.

An old Hungarian bricklayer, whom I asked how he became a Socialist, gave me the following account of his experience. It is instructive and to the point. He said: At the time that I was initiated in the Union in Budapest, whither my still slumbering yet slowly awakening class sensitiveness took me, at that time I was an adversary of Socialist thought. In the Union which I entered I was told that I should attend the several meetings where the prospects and aims of the economic movement would be explained. What was there said enlightened me. I began to feel as a member of my class, notwithstanding I still firmly declared, and believed it, that I was an enemy of Socialist theories. But one day I was induced to attend a large Socialist mass meeting, whither I went reluctantly. My amazement was boundless when I heard the speaker advocate the identical views which my fellow workers and Union men expressed daily—views that I accepted absolutely. The only

difference was that the speaker said that these views were known under the name of “Socialism.” Thus I learned that I had long been a Socialist without knowing it.

This, the work of preparation, is the task of the economic organization. The organizing of the proletariat as a “class” embraces within it everything that can be expected of a militant organization. The old preamble declared the workers must organize “politically” also, without, however, “affiliation with any political party.” This was the contradiction. In order to be consistent the declaration should also have stated whether the economic organization was also to exercise political functions—a thing which, for the reasons given, is impossible; or it should have also stated which political organization was that of the working class—also a contradiction, seeing that the process of clarification of the political organizations in this country has not yet reached its finish. Therefore it was necessary to put an end to this confusion through the declaration which is contained in the amended preamble to the effect that the workers must organize as a class. See *Communist Manifesto*.

This epistle has become pretty long, inevitably so, seeing that I proceeded above all from the premises that you, as one who is in a position to spread knowledge and light by word of mouth and with the pen, should obtain a clear understanding of what the intention was in the amending of the preamble.

The disturbances within the I.W.W. organization over the contradictory clause regarding the organization of the workers upon the political field can be ended only through a clear declaration that the workers must organize themselves as a class, in order to come into the possession of all created wealth and means of production.

If necessary and desired, I shall express my views upon other points that may not be clear.

Expecting that these lines will put you in a position to consider the labors of the last convention of the I.W.W. with a better understanding, I remain,

With fraternal greetings,

Wm. E. Trautmann,

General Secretary-Treasurer.

P.S.—Should you think it proper, this letter or portions thereof may be published in *Nepakarat*.

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

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