

# DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 9, NO. 141.

NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 1908.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

## “WASNUNING.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

**B**RYAN is “mystified”; no less so is the Volkszeitung Corporation element in the Socialist party. The one and the other can’t explain the incongruity between the votes they received and their expectations. The way Bryan expresses his amazement is: “I have to investigate this mystery of 1908.” The Volkszeitung Corporation element expresses the same thought with the German question: “Was nun?”—literally, what next? Both utterances denote the identical thing. Both proceed from the same state of mind—the state of mind a man is in who thinks himself the dupe of a three-card-monte sharp, whereas, in fact, he has not been tricked at all, only he is an ignoramus at the game he played, and imputes to trickery in others what, in truth, is ignorance on his own part. In that frame of mind are Bryan and his Volkszeitung Corporation confrères; hence both are “wasnuning.”

There is no mystery, no trickery, in the matter,—and no occasion for “wasnuning.”

Capitalism, it has been well pointed out by Marx and Engels, is that social system that digs its own grave—the Socialist Republic—, and that recruits its own grave-diggers—the proletariat. Had Marx and Engels lived to this day and observed things American, they would have added: “and Capitalism also determines its own funeral program,” or “the itinerary, or route, for its own funeral march.” What may that funeral route be?

Smooth, and wide, and alluring to the sight though the route of Political Reform is, that route capitalist development bars. The route is barred by the political turnstile. It is not the election of Taft that the late campaign has settled: what it settled is that, given our political institutions—surely none of them an accident, but each and all genuine exhalations of capitalist breath—the funeral march of capitalism

will not start until the route is struck to which the Socialist Labor Party alone has all along been pointing. All other routes are either the trunk route of Political Reform, or branches from that main trunk. All attempts at entering these routes—whether by those who can see no further than mere Reform, or by Socialists who aim beyond Reform—are bound to be dashed against the political turn-stile. Finally, the fatal and distinguishing feature of one and all of these routes is CONFIDENCE IN CAPITALIST POLITICAL INTEGRITY—a misplaced confidence, a confidence above which rises, consciously or unconsciously, the instinct of the Working Class, and, along with these, the instinct of lower property-holding classes who are pressed upon by the upper.

The point was illustrated by the fate of Bryan and Debs.

As to Bryan, his program offered relief of many a scourge, prominent among these the injunction scourge. Was it love for the injunction that caused the proletariat to vote for Taft? Of course not. What caused them to vote for Taft was the belief, frequently imparted directly by the employer, that, if Bryan was elected, the shop would shut down, and the knowledge that the threat could be executed. Thus the threat and fear of starvation took immediate effect. The political turn-stile leaves four months of unreformed capitalism (November to March) in power before politically triumphant reformed capitalism could begin to operate. Grievous though the scourge of the injunction is, it is less than that of starvation. The instinct of the proletariat caused it to prefer the former to the latter.

As to Debs, no radical difference existed between him and Bryan in point of route. Like Bryan, if elected, he would be in no position to counteract the enforcement of the Taft-capitalist threat of a shut down, nor did or could his agitation tonic the proletariat into condition mentally to resist the threat. There were those who went around saying Debs would be elected. They were crazy, but sincere; nor was their sincerity without some foundation. It is not open to question that Socialist sentiment is so widespread in the land that Debs’s election was not, theoretically, an impossibility. The theory, however, suffered shipwreck upon the granite fact that Socialist sentiment is not necessarily reducible to votes,—and never will be until the ballot that proclaims the death of capitalism comes backed with the power forthwith to strip the Capitalist Class of the power to annul that

ballot by a shut-down.

The vast majority of the masses desired Bryan; his audiences were unmistakably vast and earnest—yet, when the votes were counted, his defeat was emphatic. The Bryan enthusiasm dashed itself against the political turn-stile of capitalism. Common sense, the instinct of self-preservation rose above all other aspirations; and that instinct sees to the immediate future. A live dog is better than a dead lion. Rather than starve four months before the injunction scourge could possibly be modified, Labor meekly bent to the scourge, preferring to live. Essentially the same was the experience made by Debs. Sentiment does not necessarily materialize in votes. In the instances of Debs and Bryan it could not. Visionary was the expectation that it would.

For even the Reform sentiment to materialize in votes it must feel backed by the power to break through the political turn-stile—if necessary. It must know itself equipped with the power that annuls the four months’ lease of life left by the turn-stile to plutocratic capitalism between the November election day and the 4th of March next. If even the reform sentiment would need such equipment in order to materialize into votes, obvious must the fact be that still more thoroughly equipped for the work must be the revolutionary sentiment before it can gather any truly appreciable voting strength. Reform is incapable of so equipping itself. Only Revolution can; that equipment is the industrially organized class-conscious Union; and that consummation only the S.L.P. blazes the way for.

The at present “wasnuning” politicians are no better than ducks in thunder, with no more understanding of political meteorology than silly ducks mystified by the roll of thunder. Most pitifully silly among the lot are the pure and simple S.P. politicians, who proudly strutted the stage during the campaign—proud to bursting at the “recognition” they received from the press of the plutocratic-capitalist party. They had not wit enough to realize that the “recognition” they were so vain over had no object other than to block Socialism, seeing its purpose was to drown the voice of the S.L.P., and thereby at least put off the day when the propaganda, without which Socialism can never triumph, will finally take root and crystallize in the only power available or imaginable wherewith to cause Socialist sentiment to materialize into votes, and to strip the Capitalist Class of the means to annul the Socialist ballot by

a shut-down.

There is nothing mysterious about Taft’s tidal wave; there is nothing to “wasnun” about. To those who are mystified, or who indulge in “wasnuning,” the eloquently convincing lecture read by Professor Taft in the halls of the broad Academy of the United States Hustings is a lecture lost.

Let all others close ranks around the serene and no wise mystified standard of the S.L.P., the “wasnuning” period of which has long been cast behind it—along with its milk teeth

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

Uploaded April 2010

[slpns@slp.org](mailto:slpns@slp.org)