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EDITORIAL

SO SAY WE ALL.

By DANIEL DE LEON

LONDON despatches quote Keir Hardie as saying in the London *Socialist Review* for the current month: "I am inclined to be doleful concerning the future of the Socialist party in America{,}" the doleful prospect being due to "the deplorable fact that during the last ten years no trades unionist of any standing in New York has been brought into the Socialist movement."

There is a world of wisdom—theoretical and practical—in Keir Hardie's estimate; and a flood of light it sheds on things past, present and future in the Socialist Movement of America.

Keir Hardie's estimate, whether he is aware of it or not matters little, resolves itself into the following sequence of thought:—

1st. Without the Unions of the land connect with the Socialist Political Movement, the one and the other stagnate. The Unions, or Economic Movement, remain a power of undeveloped potentiality; the Political Movement degenerates speedily into a flash in the pan, of profit only to self-seeking stage-strutters;

2nd. None but the revolutionary Union will connect with the Socialist Political Movement; and consequently,

3rd. It must be the pre-eminent task of the Socialist Political Movement to urge into life the class-conscious Union, in other words, the preaching of the Social Revolution upon the only field on which it can be preached—the civilized field of political action.

Keir Hardie's estimate, gathered from intimate and personal observation during his recent visit to America, amounts to saying that the Socialist party has failed of its mission. This is true—yet no wholly true.

There was a special mission for the Socialist party to perform—the mission of demonstrating the soundness of the Socialist Labor Party position.

The three principles above enumerated are and have been cardinal principles with the S.L.P. An element there is in the land whose conception of Socialism is purely political. To that element the Economic Movement is, at best, merely a transient manifestation. To them the idea of at all devoting time to the Economic Movement, except to jolly and captivate the good will of its membership, is a waste of time. It is considered even worse than a waste of time: it is considered harmful. The searching criticism, that the conduct of the class un-conscious Union demands, produces irritation; “makes enemies.” The Utopian Socialist, with his visions of political victory, insensibly acquires the qualities of the capitalist politician—a suavity that means all things to all men. To the Utopian, or pure and simple political Socialist, accordingly, nothing is more abhorrent than to “give offence.” As a consequence, like ostriches in a storm, he shuts his eyes to the Economic Question. Knows nothing of it; wants to know nothing of it. This element had its representatives in the S.L.P. They objected to the S.L.P. posture on Unionism. They tried to remodel the S.L.P. principle. They failed, bolted, and in 1899 joined their kindred on the outside. Thus arose the S.P. It was of to rush to victory. Unnecessary to repeat the review made of the S.P. vote at the last election. The setback that the S.P. received in most all industrial centers, beginning with New York City, evidently did not escape Keir Hardie, and he puts his finger upon the fatal spot—the failure of the S.P. to enlist the proletariat, especially the organized.

From the circumstance that the S.P., with its pure and simple political policy, has no prospect, and that the S.L.P., with its combined economic and political policy, makes even a worse showing, as far as votes are concerned, the conclusion would seem warranted that the absolute outlook for Socialism in America is doleful—at least so far as the mind’s eye can see ahead. Such a conclusion would be rash—rash because it fails to take in all the facts in the case.

Dogmatic Socialists incur the error of holding that a certain quantity of capitalism must produce a corresponding quantity of Socialist Movement, and that, seeing the United States furnishes the largest quantity of capitalism, therefore it should also have the largest quantity of Socialist Movement to show. Finding this is not so, the Socialist dogmatist is puzzled, frequently looking bewildered, much as a duck in thunder. As with vegetation, even in the same latitude but different

atmospheric conditions, the course of the Socialist Movement is intimately affected by different social atmospheres. The social atmosphere in the United States inevitably raises the delusion of pure and simple political Socialism. The delusion is not one to be argued down. It had to be demonstrated. Had the S.L.P. remained alone in the field the process of the demonstration would have been greatly retarded. Valuable is the service rendered the American Movement by the S.P. It did not mean to be self-sacrificing, yet it obeyed self-sacrificing behest. By setting up its anti-S.L.P. principle it demonstrated with its own failure the soundness of the S.L.P. For a time the process of demonstration could not choose but retard the Movement. The presence of a party that flew the colors of Socialism yet advocated anti-Socialist tactics which, for the very reason of their being un-Socialistic, chimed in with favorite prejudices and were bound to meet with greater popularity, had necessarily to block the path of progress for the S.L.P. The expectations nursed by S.P. error having suffered shipwreck, the path is cleared—at least it is clearing for more rapid progress.

Aye, indeed, “the future of the Socialist party in America is doleful.” So say we all.

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

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