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EDITORIAL

BY THE WAY OF GOMPERS IN EUROPE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

IN view of the serious and refreshingly novel criticisms of Gompers and of his A.F. of L. that his presence and conduct have provoked in Europe, particularly in Germany, where the Berlin *Vorwaerts* referred to the A.F. of L. as “deadwood” (duerres Holtz), and the significance of the man’s intimate affiliation with the Civic Federation was the subject of deservedly caustic remarks in the *Neue Zeit*; furthermore, in response to several questions and requests that have come to this office on this subject in general, the below passages from the report of the Stuttgart International Socialist Congress, held two years ago, stating the Socialist Labor Party position as expressed by the chairman of the Party’s delegation, are here reproduced.

Speaking before the Committee on Unionism, Delegate De Leon said:

“When some comrades in Europe speak of America their words sound as if they imagine the world is bounded by the confines of their own continent. The powerful development that capitalism has reached in America implies a fuller Union Movement also. Unfortunately a portion of our Unions is organized upon a purely craft basis, in separate crafts, and each craft, all working in the same shop, has a separate contract, a circumstance that greatly hampers the united action of the workers in their class moves. I therefore have the honor to submit a resolution which condemns such autonomous Unionism, in opposition to which is Industrial Unionism, which unites all the workers of a shop without distinction of craft, and consequently all the workers in all the other shops. The narrow, self-seeking form of Unionism has been found in America to be a great menace to Labor. Take care that it does not become an equal menace in Europe, when the capitalist system will have reached here the developed stage it has reached with us. I hold the Union is to be the embryo of future society. Hence it must pursue a double political and economic goal. We therefore labor for the formation of Socialist or class-conscious Unions, to take the place of Craft Unionism. The American Federation of Labor has become an auxiliary of capitalism. Its leaders, in the words of Mark Hanna,

are the labor-lieutenants of the employers. In opposition to that we have set up the Industrial Workers of the World. In the name of the Socialist Labor Party of America, jointly with the Industrial Workers of the World, I have the honor to submit for your consideration the following resolution:

“Whereas, The integrally organized industrial organization of the Working Class is the present embryo of the Commonwealth of Labor, or Socialist Republic, and foreshadows the organic form of that Commonwealth, as well as its administrative powers;

“Whereas, Craft Unionism, wherever capitalism has reached, untrammelled, full bloom, has approved itself what the plutocratic *Wall Street Journal* of New York has hailed it, in hailing the Gompers-Mitchell American Federation of Labor, ‘The bulwark of capitalist Society,’ that bred the officialdom which the capitalist Mark Hanna designated as his ‘Labor-Lieutenanthship’; therefore be it

“Resolved, 1. That ‘Neutrality’ towards Trades Unions, on the part of a political party of Socialism, is equivalent to ‘neutrality toward the machinations of the capitalist class’;

“2. That 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 the civilized plane of the ballot; the latter as the only conceivable force with which to back up the ballot, without which all ballot is moonshine, and which force is essential for the ultimate lock-out of the capitalist class;

“3. That, 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.” (Report of Stuttgart Congress, pp. 197–199.)

Addressing the Congress in full session upon the Committee’s reports, the delegate said:

“I take the tribune in the name of the Socialist Labor Party to speak in favor of the minority resolution. First of all I must correct a statement made by the previous speaker, the representative of the majority resolution. It is not two votes, it was five that the minority resolution obtained in the Committee. One vote from my Party, one vote from England [this is an error in the report, it should have been one vote from the I.W.W. delegate] one vote from Italy, one vote from Switzerland and one vote from France. With the reporter [the previous speaker] I am agreed on two points. First of all this is a question of tactics that has its roots in economic unity. Likewise am I at one with him upon the necessity of

friendly and intimate relations between Party and Union. But I protest against the disdainful way in which Beer treats the minority. He simply ignored our resolution. He declined to discuss it with you. He has acted towards us in the manner that the Government of Wurttemberg has just acted towards citizen Quelch. The Wurttemberg Government also refused to listen. (Laughter.)

“Our principal criticism of the majority resolution consists in this:—it only takes cognizance of the Union situation of countries that are still backward in the development of Unionism; it takes no cognizance of the situation in America, where capitalism is farther {sic} developed than here on the continent. You also, it is true, have ‘Christian Unions,’ and likewise ‘Yellow Unions.’ These are all distinguished for their support of capitalism. But, in America, the leaders of the leading Unions operate in accord with the National Civic Federation, that is, with the Top Capitalists, and their principle is not the class struggle. In order to conceal the antagonisms between Capital and Labor, they pretend that the basis for action is harmony between the classes. These Trades Union leaders lead the working class into a blind alley. It is impossible to co-operate with such alignments. The time is at hand when you also will be confronted with this development, and then you will have to act accordingly. In our opinion a true political Socialist Movement can not be reared except upon a true Socialist economic Movement. We aim in the United States at the organization of industrial Unions that embrace all the workers in the same shop so as to put an end to the particularism of craft autonomy. Hence it is that I request you to accept the minority resolution, which alone takes all the economic eventualities into consideration. (‘Very well!’ from several benches.)” (Pp. 357–359.)

Considering that only five years ago, John Mitchell, Gompers’s double, was feasted in Europe, was referred to as “Comrade Mitchell,” and was otherwise much made of, the S.L.P.’s “isolated position” is somewhat widening its area.

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

Uploaded by Donna Bills, October 2010

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