

EDITORIAL

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH THE S.P.?

By DANIEL DE LEON

NO being who is in a dying condition is afflicted with just one ailment. As a rule, when dissolution has once set in, the ailments are numerous. Many a reason has been ascribed as the cause for the Socialist party's having become, as A.M. Simons, for once, truthfully said: "a hissing and a byword." No doubt the S.P. is afflicted by each of the several of the maladies diagnosed into its condition. But there is one malady that has not yet been mentioned—a malady that comes nearer than any other to being primary—a malady, moreover, which, more than any of the others, sheds a flood of light upon things worth knowing. That malady is the being run by Ex-S.L.P. men.

The observation may seem wild: it is, in fact, weighty; it may seem incredible from an S.L.P. source, as apparently derogatory to the S.L.P.: it is, in fact, a badge of distinction to the S.L.P.

The Socialist party, as planned and spontaneously launched by Victor L. Berger and Eugene V. Debs, had a mission to perform in the land. Not merely a negative mission, such as illustrating the ultimate impotence of Reform and Sentimentality; but a positive mission: the mission of breaking the way for Socialism by the accomplishment of certain results, which, while nowise qualified for the constructive work that Socialism needs and it is the mission of the Socialist Labor Party to perform, nevertheless, are indispensable for the pending revolution, as they were for all previous ones. Those results are the setting of all the social owls—lay and clerical, political and economic, traditional and mushroom-bred—a-fluttering, disconcerted by the flash of a light that, forcing itself upon their cavernous minds, would shatter their musty habits of thought and thereby "take the starch out of them." Ignorance is a Power. The Power of Ignorance, shaken in its comfortable socket, shrivels into Weakness. This is positive, not merely negative

work. This was the positive mission of the S.P. to accomplish.

Did the S.P. accomplish the mission that was cut out for it, and that it was cut out for? Nowhere in this broad land, except on one spot, the city of Milwaukee.

A party, that fulfills its mission in one single city only, while, in all the other cities of this broad land, it lies prone, disintegrating and with a vote—the one thing needed for its mission—dropping down headlong, such a party obviously is ailing badly. What's the matter with it? The contrast presented between Milwaukee in her singular loneliness, on the one side, and, on the other, New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Chicago, St. Louis, across lots to San Francisco, and criss-cross everywhere else, points to the answer:—Nowhere, outside of Milwaukee, is the S.P. free from the dead hand of the Ex-S.L.P.-man.

The Ex-S.L.P.-men in the S.P. are misfits and half-baked Socialists. If they were otherwise they would be in the S.L.P. to-day. The man who has associated with mathematicians may be too dense ever to grasp and appreciate the beauty of a difficult problem; the man who has associated with biologists may be too dull to fathom the principle of evolution; the man who has been one of a crew on an ocean vessel may be too wooden-headed ever to comprehend navigation. For all that, with all these men, something will stick of what they once handled—just enough to render them impossible. Though without capacity to penetrate serious mathematical problem, such men will realize that $2+2$ do not make 40, they will pedantically oppose those who so believe, but are unable to prove that $2+2=4$; though without capacity to utilize the teachings of evolution, such men will have some inkling of the folly of claiming man to have existed in a geologic era previous to that of the eohippus, they will fling bombastic phrases at those who claim otherwise, but are incapable of demonstrating their position; though without capacity to grasp the fundamentals of navigation, such men will demur at the notion of spreading full sails in a gale, they will be self-assertive towards those who believe otherwise, but they never will be able to furnish reasons. Exactly so with the Ex-S.L.P.-men. In touch with the Party for various terms, they acquired some information; unfit to grasp the fullness of the issue, vainglorious enough to aspire to leading positions, and finding the S.L.P. too hard to be “captured” they bolted from “S.L.P. tyranny”; hopeful that in the land of the blind their one-eyed wisdom would

be king, they rushed into the S.P.—and, in an evil hour for the S.P., were admitted, gladly admitted.

The consequence was inevitable. With just enough constructive knowledge to become impossible anywhere, the Ex-S.L.P.-man in the S.P. neither could teach the S.P., nor could he himself be taught by the S.P. If these Ex-S.L.P.-men had been only a few, the S.P. might have resisted the microbe. They were too many, at any rate enough—outside of Milwaukee—absolutely to nullify the special mission of the S.P. With the notable exception of the city of Milwaukee, which alone is carrying out the specific S.P. mission, everywhere else in all important S.P. centers, the, to the specific S.P. mission, deadly Ex-S.L.P.-men are, in the main, the runners of the S.P. press, city, State and national offices—including the Chicago *Provoker*.

Which is why we say, and our language is plain, that what's the matter with the S.P. is the Ex-S.L.P.-man misfit and microbe. Which the same we are free to maintain.

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