

Daniel De Leon

Editorial: An Open Letter To the Working Populist Farmers

Fellow toilers: Events of late have been falling fast upon your heads. Have they not yet dispelled some of the worst delusions and illusions that have hitherto led you on?

Your first illusion and delusion lay in imagining that you could save your sinking ship of small production; in failing to recognize that that hull is water-logged beyond redemption, that it has been struck by the rock of capitalism, and that your salvation lay, not in lashing yourselves to a wreck, but in jumping upon, manning, and helping those situated similarly with yourselves in other industries, to take control of the modern, the better equipped ship of large production, and steering straight to the Co-operative Commonwealth. From this first and fundamental illusion and delusion have flown all the others.

Placing your movement upon a wrong basis, starting from wrong principles, you fell into the error of failing to perceive the utter incompatibility between the class of the exploited and that of the exploiters, between the proletariat and the capitalist class, between the people and their tyrants. Instead of placing yourselves abreast of the whole exploited class of the land, pronouncing with them for the resumption by the people of all their machinery of production—land and capital, and the operation of that for use and not for private profit, you promulgated a platform that at best, and only very temporarily at that, could benefit only the farming class, and you allied

Daniel De Leon

yourselves with monopolists—the silver mine barons—who fleece the present proletariat, their mine workers, and who will fleece you to-morrow, the moment you have been stripped of all property, and have yourselves become out and out proletarians, as you surely will, if you allow the capitalist system of production to continue.

Ignoring your true friends and real allies, the only friends and allies who will to-morrow stand by you, if the battle for freedom from capitalist domination is to be fought in this country, you curried favor with the enemy of us all—the capitalist class, and you allowed yourselves to be used as a club to knock down the twiddledum Republican and strengthen the hand of the twiddledee Democratic party. Your votes, not by indirection, as during the presidential campaign, but directly in the Senatorial contests of Illinois, California, North Dakota and Kansas, sent to Washington men who represent capitalism, monopoly, as inveterately as any Republican.

You imagined that an attitude of compromise and “conciliation” would do your turn; in Kansas, with the whole machinery of government in your own hands, and protected by the Federal Constitution from the intervention of the Federal troops in the hands of the capitalist government at Washington, you tolerated an illegal body calling itself the Republican “House of Representatives” to desecrate your place of assembly; your Kansas Senate adopted resolutions favoring the “investment of capital”, i.e., favoring the further legalization of the system of fleecing the people; and after all this humility what you got for your pains was to see your Kansas House of Representatives barred out by a mob of the hirelings of capitalism, the capitalist militia mutiny, and the capitalist interests of the country applaud the anarchistic methods adopted by their Kansas confederates.

Nor is this all. The non-working property-holding, farm hands employing and fleecing farmer element, that you allowed to dictate your policy and who used your movement to promote its own interests, expected to reap a harvest for its own

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members, that you never could have reaped, and it calculated that by a policy of “singing low”, dicker, compromise, deal, bluster, and the like, it could cajole the entrenched capitalists into certain concessions, without trouble or risk to itself. That element has discovered its error. The recent events in Kansas have frightened it away. It is closely connected with the capitalist classes whom it tried to oppose. Its opposition was not dictated by a disposition to redeem the people but to fill its own pockets. Its fight was a fight between the exploiting members of society, as to which should get the larger share of the fleecings of the people. That class is bereft of the feeling of self-sacrifice, as it is not animated by any noble aim. And that class has taken wings. Excepting those among them, who have got office and who would not like to give up their salaries, all have fled to where they came from, back to their old Democratic or Republican vomit—and you have been left in the lurch.

What will now be your course?

Will you sink back into hopeless despair, or will you allow yourselves to be bamboozled by schemers and would-be politicians, or will you, disabused by recent experience, stir yourselves to renewed, but effective work?

There are breakers ahead, and storms are gathering that only the most dauntless breasts can resist. Picayune subtreasury demands, palliatives that can do none but a few any good, even the demand for the collective ownership of this or that industry, while at the same time upholding the system of exploitation, will not fire the popular heart, and cannot steel the courage of men to dare and do great deeds.

Working Farmers! Use the wreck of the populist movement as a stepping stone to a higher plane. Come out, unterrorized by the bowl of the “friendly industries” that are fast turning our people into Russian serfs; raise yourselves above the limitations of our own, but doomed, class of small producers; open your eyes to the fact that production on a large scale is the inevitable course of the social evolution, that it must needs lead

Daniel De Leon

to popular enslavement if it continues in private hands, and that to turn it from a curse into a blessing it must be placed in the hands of the people; lock arms with the industrial and agricultural proletariat; place yourselves under the folds of the banner that heralds the abolition of the wage system, the abolition of class rule, the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of the Co-operative Commonwealth. In that sign you can win, and in no other.

Here, as in all civilized lands, that standard has been reared. It is the banner of the Socialist Labor party, upheld as a beacon to our people, and destined either to be carried on to victory, or, if it fail of that, to go down only in the ruin that would engulf society.

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