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EDITORIAL

LIGHT TURNED ON.

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THE tone, partly recriminative, partly sychophantic, of the Social Democratic, alias “Socialist” party press, on the subject of a “Union Labor Party,” threatened to becloud the issue that has forced itself to the fore in that camp. The temptation with us is strong to laugh at the “muddle,” and dispose of it with a “We told you so.” The issue, nevertheless, is too vital for such treatment. Evidently the disputants themselves are not aware of the significance of what is up among them. If they are not, much less so the on-lookers. Light thereon becomes important.

What is called the “split in the Socialist Labor Party,” of 1899, was simply the coming to a head of two distinctly opposed principles of Socialist policy. One set maintained that the Labor Movement was essentially political: It concluded from this postulate that the political manifestation had to be the dominant, and not the economic, important tho’ the economic was. The other set maintained that the Labor Movement was essentially economic: It concluded from its postulate that, however essential the political manifestation, it was to be the subservient, the economic manifestation the dominant one.

On the one side, it was shown with proofs cumulative that the very nature of the subject matter of the economic organization exposed this to the blunders, aye, to the corrupt manoeuvres of the Middle Class; and that the sick and death benefit features, that naturally sprung up in the economic organization, only tended to render more pronounced the likeness in appearance and conduct between the Trades Union and the small property holder. Finally, the case on this side was summed up with the Marxian psychologic principle of looking only to those who have “nothing to lose but their chains.” In view of all this and more to this effect, those who maintained the first principle—never oblivious of the social architectural theory that the Trades Organization

has to be the basis of the Socialist Republic—held that the safety of the Labor Movement lay in the domination of its economic by its political manifestation.

On the other side, it was contended that the evils, and even the dangers, arising from the economic organization should and could be prevented by Socialist activity within these bodies. The blunders and corrupt manoeuvres that manifested themselves in them should and could be counteracted, checked and ultimately removed by Socialist efforts from within. This policy came to be known as “Boring from Within.” Those who sided with it—adhering equally to the social architectural theory that the Trades Organization has to be the basis of the Socialist Republic—held that the safety of the Labor Movement lay in the subserviency of the political to its economic manifestation.

This is but a rough and sharp outline of the issue. It was called the issue on the Trades Union policy of the Socialist Labor Party. Long did the conflict rage within the Party. The former policy gained the ascendancy and held it, and its has continued to this day the policy of the S.L.P. Thereon the split occurred. Of course, ruptures always are the opportunity of designing men, it is their chance. So in this instance. An “intellectual” canaille flocked to the seceding side. Obscene political schemes drew it in their vortex, and the issue was submerged. More than once in these columns was the warning uttered not to confound the stream with the scum on its surface, and thus lose sight of the real issue. Yet, momentarily submerged tho’ it was, it has reappeared, and now in the camp of the seceders themselves—the Social Democratic, or “Socialist” party. Its present manifestation is the “Union Labor Party” issue. Like murder, the issue would not down.

Freed from all confusing accessories, the central kernel of the “Socialist” or “Social Democratic” party policy is the policy above described of the seceders from the Socialist Labor Party. How true this is, is made manifest by the “Socialist” or “Social Democratic” party attitude in the A.F. of L. convention; its joy at the “big vote polled for Socialism” at the convention; its reliance upon the Wilsons and other such supporters there; its loyalty to Mitchell; its opposition to all denunciation of what the Socialist Labor Party terms “fakirs’ crimes and corruption”; finally, its oft-asserted principles of “nominating only Union men on its tickets.” This is “boring from within.” Up to that period both wings of the party are agreed. Beyond that lies the principle, alone logical from such premises, that the economic must dominate the political manifestation of the Labor

Movement. There the two wings part company. The one, with praiseworthy logic, consequently with integrity, says: “Our boring from within means that our ideal must be the going up of our party into the economic movement the moment we have bored to the point.” The other, with suspicious logic, says: “Our boring from within means that our ideal must be the going up of the economic movement into our party the moment we have bored to the point.” In other words, the latter abandons its fundamental principles, the former strictly adheres thereto; the latter strips itself of all “raison d’être,” the former attests its justification to exist.

Whatever the convictions of the Socialist Labor Party, concerning the proper Trades Union policy for the Socialist Movement to pursue, the Party recognizes in the policy it rejects one that must naturally attract honest, tho’ untutored, adherents. The Party recognizes that the issue of the two policies is one bound to rise and re-rise, and keep the Socialist Movement divided until the issue is settled to the comprehension of those vast and honest masses, who need “permanent experience”. No dodge will stand. Consequently, the Party, tho’ unflinchingly pursuing the policy it holds right, makes, as all intelligent men must, ample allowance for the fallibility of the human mind. Should experience prove it wrong, then, not with the furled flag and muffled drum of the whipped, but with the colors flying and the drums rolling of those who honestly and firmly helped solve a problem, it would march joyfully over into the camp that was right, and join with them in an irresistible onslaught upon capitalism.

With no hobby to ride, but Truth as the sole means, and the emancipation of the Working Class as the sole aim, the Socialist Labor Party hails with joy the reappearance of the tactical principle that it combats—now striving for the upper hand in the “Socialist” or “Social Democratic” party camp under the name of the “Union Labor Party Issue”—hopeful that the principle will this turn evolve virility enough to resist being re-submerged by dodging schemers.

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