

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 6, NO. 305.

NEW YORK, TUESDAY, MAY 1, 1906.

ONE CENT.

ARTICLE

THE SOCIALIST LABOR PARTY.

By DANIEL DE LEON

[From the May Day Issue of the Cleveland *Volksfreund*."]

A SKETCH of the Socialist Labor Party is a difficult thing to make. The events of to-day cannot be understood but by the light of the events of yesterday; nor can the events of yesterday be appreciated in their full value except by the light of the events of to-day—that is, the ripened events of yesterday. Historians have this whole sequel before them. They are not truly historians, nor is what they write history, except the subject has been rounded up and is complete. The S.L.P. is not a thing of the past. Its work is not yet rounded up and complete. We may have a better comprehension of its acts of yesterday by its acts of to-day; but seeing that its acts of to-day will require the acts of to-morrow in order to be themselves well understood, it is obvious that a sketch of the Party from the present historic elevation can be only cursory.

The S.L.P. went, in a way, through the experience of the Social Democracy in Germany, that is to say, the prow of its ship is not to-day directed to the same point, exclusively, as at the start. Its “sea-letters” have remained the same; its goal has not been altered; but the winds and the currents it has had to beat against, and the unveiling of the opposite shore, as the ship drew nearer, have all contributed to compel it to tack. This experience is one made by all revolutionary parties of the present and of past years, in all countries. I have singled out the German Social Democracy as a parallel to our Socialist Labor Party merely on account of the contrast that the very parallel establishes between the two. Started as an unqualifiedly Socialist revolutionary party, consequently anti-parliamentarian, as Liebknecht’s great dictum “Parliamentiren ist paktiren,” indicates, the German Social Democracy was compelled by the exigencies of the navigation of the politico-social waters of Germany to attend to immediate needs. As excellently put by the

Berlin Social Democratic paper, *Die Neue Gesellschaft* of the 21st of last March: “Wir in Deutschland habennicht nur fur den Socialismus, sondern VORERST AUCH NOCH FUR DIE DEMOKRATIE ZU KAMPFEN.” Contrariwise, and similarly, the Socialist Labor Party, started originally with the idea that the capture of political power would accomplish the Revolution, has been compelled by the exigencies of the navigation of the socio-political waters of the land to so remodel its course as to aim simultaneously at the conquest of political power, and at the promotion of that economic organization of the working class, without which, as the Manifesto of the New Jersey Unity Conference well puts it, political victory would be but a “flash in the pan” if not an invitation to “national disaster.” The contrast—parallel between the Socialist Labor Party and the German Social Democracy is of keen interest to comprehend the track of the Socialist Labor Party—the backward political and social condition of Germany compelled the German Socialist ship to be steered several points further away from its goal than when it started; the advanced political and social condition of the United States, on the contrary, compelled the Socialist Labor Party ship to be steered several points closer to its goal than when first launched.

The history of the Socialist Labor Party from its incipency up to date has been the struggle, triumphantly carried on, to establish the following five tenets, without which, jointly, the Socialist movement of the land can only become a turbid pool for “intellectual” and other schemers to fish in after political preferment, and fake the movement into rottenness. These five tenets are:

First—The economic organization is essential to the emancipation of the working class;

Second—The political movement of Labor is indispensable in the struggle for emancipation;

Third—The available political movement of Socialism must be the direct offshoot from the class-consciously economically organized working class;

Fourth—The political movement, that is available in the struggle for Labor’s emancipation, is in duty bound to recognize its parent and source: “Neutrality” cannot be found in its vocabulary: where that word is found, it is evidence of the spuriousness of the alleged political movement; and, lastly

Fifth—There is an obvious connection between the political and the economic movement of Labor—no less and no stronger a connection than there is between the scouts of an army and the army itself: indispensable as its scouts are to an army, so indispensable is its political movement to the integrally, industrially organized working class; as unessential as its scouts are for the army's final act of battle, so unessential is the political movement for that final act of emancipation which consists in the "taking and holding" of the productive powers of the land. It is "without affiliation" with its scouts that an army delivers battle: "without affiliation" with its political arm, the working class, embattled in its industrially constructed economic organization, moves into possession and ousts the capitalist class.

As I said above, the establishment of these tenets, now no longer left in doubt, has been accompanied with a continuous struggle. Beautiful are the struggles of the movement in their various manifestations in the several countries of modern civilization. In none, however, does the special struggle, carried on in America by the Socialist Labor Party, present so inspiring a sight. Due to the backwardness of capitalist development, together with the therefrom flowing political backwardness in most of the other countries, the Socialist movements in them are more closely alike than they are to the Socialist movement that American conditions demand. As a consequence, the fact was seen, sad to record although natural enough, that the Socialist Labor Party was and is unsympathetic to the Socialist movements of the rest of the world. Added to this unavoidable circumstance came another, to a certain degree the reflex of the first: the vaguely Socialistic revolutionary proletarian elements of the land that were groping their way toward solid ground, were in a measure captured by "intellectual" immigrants who took their bearings from Europe, set up an opposition party to the Socialist Labor Party, and rolled up at the last presidential election 400,000 votes for their ticket, while the Socialist Labor Party barely held its own with 34,000 votes. No more magnificent sight does the movement anywhere present than the sight which followed. The Party which had just polled 400,000 votes but was reared on untenable ground, immediately grew top-heavy and began to crumble. The Socialist Labor Party, with its smaller but well-planted organization, immediately began to enlarge. The militant element in

the opposition party throughout the land began to draw near the S.L.P. element, and are now in full train of coalescing. Its vote, the only thing that opposition party could boast of, has been melting away like snow before the sun with New York, Chicago and even Milwaukee leading in the melting away process. It is an inspiring evidence of the strength inherent in soundness, and of the honesty and intelligence that animates the masses in substance. Reliant upon these facts the Socialist Labor Party fought out this battle single-handed against the world.

There is where the Party stands to-day. The spontaneous rising of the Industrial Workers of the World is an earnest that whatever struggles still are ahead—and no doubt there are many and fierce ones to come—the movement in America will no longer have to wade knee-deep in the bogs of inexperience. The militant element, gathering in the camp of the I.W.W., is drilling the “Army of Occupation” that is to “take and hold” the productive powers of the land, and set up the administrative government of the Socialist Republic—with the battle-rent and battle-ried banner of the Socialist Labor Party blazoning on the march.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded March 2009

slpns@slp.org