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EDITORIAL

METZ, THE GLASS-HOLDER.

By DANIEL DE LEON

WELL did Controller Metz of New York City hold the mirror up to reform and reformers before the City Club of Philadelphia on the 9th inst., when he said:

“I used to be a reformer once; but I got into office and grew out of the reform habit.”

Leaving aside the “invidious” question of how close a connection there is between Controller Metz’s landing into office and his consequent landing outside the camp of reform, the fact remains that it is the common habit of reformers, even apart from such inducements, to grow out of the reform ideas with age.

Youth is proverbially the season of sentiment, sanguine temperament, enthusiasm for right, and impatience with error. The inequalities of life show greatest to youthful eyes, and there most seductively shimmer the visions of things as they ought to be. The criticism of the world is done by young men, or by men old in years who have remained young in spirit. It is the impetuosity of youth that flings men into reform movements.

But along with increase of years goes another phenomenon. Conservatism encrusts one’s thoughts. Being comfortable takes then the place of being right. Dulled by years of acquaintance, the mind now contemplates with complacency, wrongs and injustices which would have once seemed monstrous. The up-hill struggle has tired, and now seems hopeless. Material interest in keeping things as they are drowns out the voice of abstract conscience. And so the reformer, who has gone on the assumption that present systems were basically right but only need a few superficial improvements, sinks into the slough of “let well enough alone,” or as Controller Metz put it, “gets out of the reform habit.”

No{t} so the revolutionist. His grasp of things goes deeper. He knows that the

present system is but the latest of a long procession of systems all having one thing in common, exploitation. He knows that the present system is based on a fallacy, namely, that idleness is a co-factor with labor in the production of wealth. He knows that the living by one man upon the backs of a multitude is not a right to be tempered by less rigorous exercise, but a wrong to be abolished. He knows that the source of evil lies in economic dependence, and that economic independence can only be attained by a complete reconstruction of society. He knows that economic development and working class thought are relentlessly building towards that reconstruction. Armored in that knowledge, and equipped with the sword of the class struggle to cut his way through the thickets of opportunism, the revolutionist continues his career undaunted. Braced by sound economics, he never “gets out of the revolution habit.” He knows too much for that.

The Socialist who may sometimes be seen throwing up the sponge and declaring the struggle is useless, was never a Socialist at heart. He was but one of those reformers to whom Controller Metz held up the glass. Not such can be the architects of the co-operative commonwealth; that privilege is left to the revolutionist. Strength to his arm!

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

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