

EDITORIAL

POLITICAL FUNCTION OF THE DISFRANCHISED.

By DANIEL DE LEON

A PROPOS of a statement made by K.E. Choate, of Houston, Tex., in the November 18 issue of the *Daily People*, to the effect of there being twenty-five or thirty million disfranchised wage-slaves in the United States, a Lindberg, Wash., correspondent objects, first, that “there is not more than twenty-five or thirty million wage-slaves in the United States”; secondly, that “if they are all disfranchised, what would be the use of a working class political party?” and what alternative would there be but “direct action”?

The two errors—one of facts, the other of reasoning—underlying our esteemed Lindberg correspondent’s objections, though repeatedly exposed, are of a nature to demand continued exposure.

The population of the United States proper, is not less than 95,000,000. If there were only 25,000,000, or even 30,000,000, wage-slaves among the 95,000,000 and odd, there would be a balance of over 65,000,000 non-wage-slaves of various shades of capitalism, or more than twice the number, in which case neither Political nor Direct Action could do the trick. The facts are otherwise.

As nearly as the numerous factors bearing upon the problem allow a conclusion, the wage-slave population of the land runs up to not less than 70 per cent. of the whole, or 67,000,000 in round figures. Even if fully 30,000,000 of these should be “disfranchised,” there would remain a residue of about 37,000,000 non-“disfranchised” wage-slaves—a number larger by fully 9,000,000 than the total of non-proletarians, with a proportionately larger and overwhelming voting power. These are the facts. A number of additional factors may qualify these facts in various ways. The net practical result remains the same—the wage-slave is the majority, the large majority, class, outnumbering the non-wage class outside and inside

the political field by many hundreds of thousands, and this has been the situation of the country for certainly longer than two score years.

As to the error in reasoning, incurred by our esteemed correspondent—that was exposed more than four years ago in these columns, in the course of a series of articles that were since collected and published under the title, *As to Politics*, and to which we would refer our Lindberg critic.

John Sandgren, whose “Direct Action” irrationality gave occasion for the articles and letters above mentioned, and who in his second letter concluded that the many millions of child, woman, foreign, Negro, floating and otherwise disfranchised workers “can in no manner be interested in politics,” was answered as follows:

“The conclusion reveals one of the false notions that dominate the anti-political action mind. That mind cannot disengage itself from the notion that political action begins and ends with conventions, nominations of tickets, and voting. This is false. Political action, conducted by revolutionists, consists in something else besides those acts; it consists in something else infinitely more important than any or all of those acts; it consists in revolutionary agitation and education upon the civilized plane that presupposes a peaceful trial of strength; that is, settlement of the dispute. What is to be done with them—these child, woman, foreign, Negro, floating, and otherwise disfranchised wage workers—politically? What? fully sixty per cent. of them, that is, all except the infants and the sick, can be made the carriers of the agitational and educational propaganda of the revolution conducted upon the civilized plane. Though they be not entitled to cast a single vote, they can distribute literature, and those who have the gift—though foreign, female, Negro or otherwise disfranchised—can by speech promote the revolution by teaching it on the political platform. We all know that this actually happens.”

K.E. Choate was right—nor do the facts he alleges leave the Movement no alternative but to commit suicide with the blunderbuss of “Direct Action.”

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded November 2012

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