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EDITORIAL

SOCIALISTS' ELECTIONS TO A.F. OF L. POSTS.

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IN its report of the Haywood-Hillquit debate of the previous day, the New York *Call* of the 12th of the current month has it that “in closing, Hillquit quoted the declaration of neutrality by the Socialist party on all questions concerning the internal affairs and methods of organization of the labor unions. Since that declaration great progress had been made by the Socialist propaganda in the A.F. of L., and Max Hayes was quoted where he gave a long list of labor unions in the A.F. of L. that had elected Socialists to the most responsible official positions [the A.F. of L. Atlanta Convention] because they are Socialists and known as such.” This is a correct reportorial condensation of the lengthy passage as it appears in the “verbatim report” of the debate, published two days later in the same paper.

If the statement means anything it means that the Socialists, put into Union office, were put into office, not only because they were known to be Socialists, but for the purpose of affording them broader opportunities to spread the light of Socialism; and that they are availing themselves of the opportunity; and that it was the Socialist party's Trades Union policy that set the ball of these Socialist officers rolling.

The facts are exactly the opposite—and they are known to be the opposite by Mr. Hillquit.

When, in its 1900 annual convention, that is, before the Socialist party had promulgated “Neutrality,” the Socialist Labor Party decreed that its members shall not accept office in Gompers, or reactionary, Unions, the action was taken upon an extensive, a lamentable, an eye-opening experience. Three typical incidents will illumine the experience.

Isaac Bennett, of this city, a member of Gompers's Cigarmakers Union, and S.L.P. man, had for years acted as a clear headed Socialist. He knew, he abhorred,

and he exposed the capitalistic iniquities of Gompersism. Aware of the slave-pen conditions that the Gompers Union, in alliance with the employers, reduced the cigar factories to, Bennett stayed out of the shops, and started a little cigar store of his own. For quite a while the venture kept his head above water. But evil times came upon him. His stress was quickly availed of by the labor lieutenants of the cigar manufacturers. He, who before then was looked upon by them with well merited "suspicion," now was boosted into a variety of fat offices;—and he succumbed. From being an active promoter of Socialism among the wage-slaves, he became an irate gouger for the labor fakirs who controlled his living.

John Tobin, formerly of Rochester, N.Y., now of Massachusetts, a shoemaker and S.L.P. man, had been noted far and wide in his craft as an active educator in class-consciousness. Burdened with a heavy mortgage on his house, with a large family of youngsters to provide for, and his cobbler store in a Rochester back alley being less and less equal to the task of keeping the wolf from his door, the Tempter finally approached him. The office of President of the then newly organized Boot and Shoe Workers' Union was too lucrative to decline, and, once accepted, was too profitable to be put in jeopardy by hostilizing the labor lieutenants of the shoe manufacturers. Tobin succumbed. He became an arch type of reactionist, and landed in the Civic Federation.

Ben Hanford, of this city, a member of the Gompers Typographical Union, and S.L.P. man, had for many a year been a thorn in the side of labor-fakirism in his Union. Aware of the dastardly scabbery that the officers of his Union had perpetrated upon the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance stereotypers in the Lipschitz shop, he had led the culprits a wild dance; realizing, in 1899, from previous experiences that the then contemplated strike against the New York *Sun* was, as it finally turned out a financial "strike" by his Union's Wahneta clique, and, the matter coming up before Section New York, S.L.P., he loudly declared his S.L.P. integrity against his Union's corruption. Within a few days after the latter performance Hanford went back upon all his traditions; he cloaked the "labor leaders" misdeeds; he became, and remained to his dying day, a slanderously wrathful foe of the S.L.P., with a wrath that betrayed the uneasy conscience. What had happened? His pinching poverty had been utilized. Down to then a "genius of famine," Hanford suddenly

appeared well clothed and fed. He had received a \$5 a day job on one of the Strike Committees.

As with these, so with others.

It was, indeed, because “they were Socialists and known as such” that these men were put into good offices in their Union. But the “promotion” was not done in the interest of Socialism, it was a bribe to scuttle Socialism.

The S.L.P. was not silly enough to be flattered by Gompers’s new departure of electing “long lists” of its members to his Union offices; nor was the S.L.P. the corrupt body that would wink at the manoeuvre. The decoy ducks, whom Gompers and his P.J. McGuire of the Carpenters were hatching in the S.L.P., were promptly nailed to the pillory. The exposure precipitated the split in the Party—Mr. Hillquit, of course, together with the decoy ducks and all the would-be decoy ducks, bolting to where “progress” promised to be undisturbed.

The “progress,” that consists in Socialists being bribed with office to cloak with their Socialist reputation a labor-betraying Gompersism, had set in before the S.P. “Neutrality” was invented. That “progress” was, indeed, a sign of progress. It testified to the effectiveness of the S.L.P.’s class-conscious agitation. For that very reason the “progress” was threatened with speedy extinction. The S.P.’s share in that “progress” consists in its having given the “progress” a new lease of life by pronouncing the iniquities of the Gompersistic labor leaders a “noble waging of the class struggle”; and, by thus throwing the mantle of Socialism over the nasty thing, giving a vastly wider scope to the pestilence.

It needs a superb, Tweed-like effrontery to boast of such a “progress.” Still more Tweed-like is the effrontery of pointing boastfully, as the latest evidence of that remarkable “progress,” to the long list of “progress” specimens who were elected to the late Atlanta convention of the A.F. of L., and who there gave, on a national scale, an exhibition of the nature of the progress that they embody by unanimously voting for the re-election of the Civic-Federationized and Militia-of-Christized national officers, from Gompers down.

As with the capitalist who boosts pliable workingmen into political jobs, so with the caricature of the capitalist, the Gompers “labor leader,” when he pushes pliable Socialists into his Union’s offices. It is because he knows his protégé to be a work-

ingman, a pliable one, that the capitalist clothes him in the dignity and opportunity of office—the added dignity and opportunity to be used against the interests of the Working Class; so, likewise, it is because he knows his protégé to be a Socialist, a pliable one, that the Gompers “labor leader” clothes him in the dignity and opportunity of office—the added dignity and opportunity to be used to run Socialism into the ground. The “progress” made by Socialism through the election of “a long list of Socialist party men” to A.F. of L. posts is identical with the “progress” made by the Working Class through the “long list of workingmen” put into capitalist political jobs.

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