

Daniel De Leon

Editorial: How We Die

To the tune of “Socialism is Dead”; tremulously uttered by the representatives of the various capitalist interests in the German Reichstag, and echoed and re-echoed through all the penny-whistles of our own plutocratic press here, the capitalist Reichstag trotted steadily towards its own dissolution, hastened thither by the kicks of the “dead” Socialists.

On the 6th instant that “august” body was dissolved by Imperial rescript. It had been found impossible to unite the various factions that represented the various interests rooted in capitalism, and obtain from them a majority vote in favor of the Army bill. Though, together, the capitalist and reactionary representatives formed a majority, the Socialist minority triumphed; the bill was defeated and hurled back into the teeth of the Drill-master Emperor, and a new election ordered.

No intelligent observer of European events expects that any but the Socialist party will gain by the new elections; even the wiseacres, who but a few months ago were most positive that Socialism was annihilated, now express the conviction of “tremendous Socialist gains.” Was the German Government ignorant of the situation? Were the capitalist representatives, who could have avoided this impending Socialist victory by joining in putting the bill through, ignoramuses? No! and No again. Their conduct is simply illustrative of the Law of Revolutions; it also proves the additional weaknesses, pointed out by Socialism, from which Capitalism suffers.

Daniel De Leon

When a social order has run its course, there is no drug known to the pharmacopoeia of politics to save it. Strategy, diplomacy, shifts, may serve the turn for a while, but they soon become inapplicable. From that moment simple numbers cease to tell. The spirit from which they once derived their strength is fled, and then it works against as powerfully as once it worked for them. The recent majority in the Reichstag was like a majority of corpses, soulless and powerless; no wisdom could, in the nature of things, direct their council; their conduct from that moment partook of the nature of that of the Malay, who runs amuck; at heart he knows he is about to die, but in his insanity he finds satisfaction in trying to slaughter others first, whether they be friends or foes.

This law, inherent in social revolutions, is emphasized in the dying throes of Capitalism. The capitalist rule, of all that have preceded it, alone presents the appearance of a house divided against itself. All previous social systems were swayed by a united ruling class. Capitalism alone presents the picture of a ruling class, not disunited only, but made up of factions, whose interests are wholly irreconcilable. Of the half a dozen or more capitalist interests represented in the Reichstag, no two could be said to be able to prosper together; the advantage of the one meant the positive disadvantage of the other. Nothing can keep such a reactionary mass together but the circumstance that its historic mission is not yet fulfilled. When this, however, has come about, such a mass is hopelessly rent asunder; to hold it together, least of all with the powerful breath of Socialism beating against it, is as hopeless a task as to hold together the sands of the desert when the simoom is raging.

The dissolution of the Reichstag marks the wonderful advance of Socialist thought, and the elections there will record the length of this advance in eloquent figures; the French elections, that must come off in October next will bring fresh laurels and fresh trophies to the cause of the Social Revolution; and here in our own country, we may confidently look forward

How We Die

towards a yearly November record at the polls that will unerringly denote the receding of the waters of Capitalism and the approach of the flood of Socialism.

The People, Vol. III, No. 7. Sunday, May 14, 1893

How We Die

*A De Leon editorial transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the
Official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.*

Uploaded August 2002