

# DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 5, NO. 161.

NEW YORK, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 8, 1904.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

## OUR ZEMSTVOS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**W**E in America have no Zemstvos! For the “Zemstvo” Russian conditions are requisite! It requires at one end of the social line an oppressed mass, timorously struggling for freedom, and the counterpart of that, at the other end, an arrogant knout-wielding Czar! We have none of that! Consequently, there is no “Zemstvos” in ours!

Well, there is. We have that identical oppressed mass, timorously struggling for freedom, and that identical arrogant, knout-wielding Czar at the other end.

Nonsense!

Nonsense? Just read President Roosevelt’s message—the passage on Capital and Labor. There will be found reproduced the picture cast upon the canvas by the recent mutual posture of Zemstvos and Czar—or as the things would be called here, Organized Labor and Capital.

In Russia, the Zemstvos represent the germs of political representative government. They are the forecasts and foreshadowings of free political institutions. Accordingly, the Zemstvos are an emanation of the breath of democratic aspirations. All that is in opposition to Czardom, which is a denial of democracy, an assertion of Autocracy. The principle, that, consciously or unconsciously, has given birth to the Zemstvos is a powerful principle, on whose brow shines the star of ultimate victory; for all that, what with their youngness, the pressure of the opposing and now dominant force of Autocracy, and unquestionably also the corrupting influence of this force upon themselves, the Russian Zemstvos are still weak upon their legs. Accordingly, the Zemstvo’s posture is still timorous: it is contradictory: it stands for freedom, yet it bends, and bows, and scrapes before Autocracy, whom it pats on the back and with whom it seeks “conciliation”, “harmony”, “fraternal relations”. Weakness on the part of the wronged ever engenders overbearingness on the part of

the wrongdoer. Nevertheless, the attitude of the Czar before the rising Zemstvos is not an attitude of merely intensified overbearingness. The most autocratic wrongdoer is affected by the Spirit of the Age. The Moscovite Autocrat feels the subtle influence. His attitude is a compromise. One time he would have answered with wholesale imprisonment, punctuated with not a few sentences of death for the most pronounced representatives of the “spirit of riot against the institutions that have rendered Russia powerful, prosperous and happy”. Not so now. He also indulges in some bows, stiff ones, but still bows. His words, accordingly, used towards the Zemstvos whom fain he would throttle, and whom he means to throttle, soon as he has a chance, are chosen in obedience to the exigency of the times. He does not rave; he does not pronounce the Zemstvos an impious attempt against the laws of God; no; what he says is in substance this:

“I favor the organization of the Zemstvos; my subjects have the right to organize themselves; such organizations are legitimate to secure the rights of the individual; all encouragement I can give them shall be given—so long as they are conducted with a due and decent regard for the rights of the Imperial Crown. But when any such organization seeks improper ends, or seeks to achieve proper ends by improper means, then all the officers of the Crown must oppose the wrongdoing resolutely.”

What is meant by “a decent regard of the rights of the Imperial Crown” is obvious; obvious also is the meaning of the “improper ends” that must be “resolutely opposed”. The “rights of the Imperial Crown” means Autocracy; the “improper ends” means the overthrow of Autocracy; the “resolute opposition” means the application of the mailed hand to all such revolutionary manifestation. Much can be learned by us in America from the present mutual posture between Russian Autocracy and Zemstvos. It illumines the tableau between Organized Capital and Organized Labor. It illumines the spiked-police-club President’s message on Capital and Labor.

The Trades Union is a forecast and foreshadowing of the parliament of the Socialist Republic. As such, it is an emanation of the breath of economic freedom. All that is in opposition to Capitalism, which is a denial of human freedom, an assertion of Labor’s enslavement. As with the Russian Zemstvo, the principle, that, consciously or unconsciously gives birth to the Trades Union, is a principle on whose

brow shines the star of ultimate triumph. As certain as the Czar's political Autocracy will go down before the spirit of political freedom represented by the Zemstvo, just so inevitable is the downfall of Capital's economic Autocracy, and, along with that, its political supremacy, before the spirit that gives birth to the Trades Union. The liberation of Labor is in the card of the times. Nevertheless, and for all that, what with the present inexpertness of the Trades Union, what with the pressure of the opposing and now dominant force of Capitalist Autocracy, and unquestionably also what with the corrupting influence of this force upon Labor, the American Trades Union still stands upon vacillating legs. Hence it is still timorous: it is contradictory: it stands for freedom yet it bends, and bows, and cringes before the Capitalist, with whom it seeks "conciliation", "harmony", "fraternal relations"—at all points exactly as the Zemstvos towards their Czar.

Nor is the posture of the Capitalist Class of America different, at this pass and stage, from its Moscovite counterpart. Like the Moscovite Autocrat, the American Capitalist Class is sensitive to the subtle influence of the atmosphere of the Age. Fain would it also stamp out the "rising spirit of riot against the institutions that have made America powerful, prosperous and happy". But it can not; it dare not. It tried the game in distant Colorado, and felt compelled to draw in its horns and hide its cloven hoof. Its posture also is that of enforced compromise. One touch of Nature makes all Usurpers kin. In the approved style of his Moscovite ditto, the American Capitalist Class frames its words and posture to suit the times. How absolutely identical are its spirit and posture with those resorted to by the Russian Usurper may be gathered from the message of its chief representative, to Congress. The President says:

There should be organization of labor in order better to secure the rights of the individual wage-workers. All encouragement should be given to any such organization, SO LONG AS IT IS CONDUCTED WITH A DUE AND DECENT REGARD FOR THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS \* \* \* But when any labor union seeks IMPROPER ENDS, or seeks to achieve proper ends by IMPROPER MEANS",

then the wrongdoer must be OPPOSED RESOLUTELY. Who the "others" are, whose "rights" must receive "due and decent regard", need no explanation; nor is

any explanation needed on what constitutes “improper ends” or “improper means”, or yet “proper ends”. The “rights” referred to are those of the Capitalist Class to plunder and slaughter the Working Class and keep it in subjection: those “rights” must receive “due and decent regard”: “proper ends” are only those that will leave unscathed the autocratic power of Capitalism: “improper” is any end that would aim at the opposite: “improper” every means that would have practical results, and “proper” eminently “proper means” are only those of twaddle—spit-balls to fight the Usurper with: the more ineffective or spit-ballish, all the more commendable and “proper” is the means, all “improper ends” or “improper means” against the rights of the Usurper will be “resolutely opposed”—Sherman Belled.

Have we no Zemstvos in America? And are we not witnessing here a scene that bears close parallel with that which is being enacted in Russia? Of course! Nor will the issue be different.

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

Uploaded September 2007

[slpns@slp.org](mailto:slpns@slp.org)