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CORRESPONDENCE

AS TO POLITICS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

I HAVE been much interested in the discussion under the heading of “As To Politics”{;} so much so that I was sorry to see it stop almost before it started. The article by John Sandgren was very good except in regard to the vote which does not affect the question. All we need to know is that the working class is in the majority. We DO know they will be counted on the economic field. So I will take a stand in this discussion that working class political action, parliamentary or agitation is not only harmful to the marshalling of the working class but that the industrial organization is all sufficient, hence, I contend the I.W.W. should change its preamble by declaring against political action.

Comrade De Leon says we confuse “political agitation” with the “ballot,” so we will analyze “political agitation” and endeavor to determine if its value is “immeasurable”; also if “the bringing together of an industrial organization able ‘to fill the bucket’ without the aid of political agitation.” Political action may be summed up as follows: Political organization, business meetings, mass meetings, conventions, propaganda meeting{s}, placing tickets on the ballot, watching at polls, burning midnight oil studying election laws and tricks of the professional politician, spending tremendous sums of money, all of which means a great deal when the organization attains any size of importance. Then Mr. Workingman is in politics so confused and befuddled that he don’t know whether he is a workingman or a professional politician. Comrade De Leon is correct when he states: “In Feudal days, when the Lords fell out, production stopped; war had the floor; the courts of the law have become the main field of capitalist, at least internal capitalist, battles, and production continues uninterfered with.” Thus showing the capitalists have good reasons to settle their disputes by the courts through politics because they are property owners and needs must have their revenues uninterrupted. The working

class, on the other hand, are propertiless, giving them advantage on the economic battlefield, having nothing to lose but their chains. It is there where the struggle must be, and it is there and there only where the working class will reach the heart of capitalism. Every victory won, every hour of leisure gained, every "supply wagon" captured, will be of unlimited more value to the revolution than the conquering of a piece of paper called the ballot. Then what is political agitation but the urging of the working class to go into politics and when you do that you can't give him any material reason for so doing because the fight of the working class is economic in character, not political. The economic organization can "back up" the political, but the political cannot back up the economic in this country any more than in Germany or Russia. Those expecting to secure power on the political field will some day find themselves chasing the rainbow which appears very beautiful, but always out of reach. The working class is not exploited by the political "burg" of capitalism, but through the private ownership of the means of production, hence his malady is not a political disease but economic. His environment in the mills, factories, mines, fields, etc., gives him an economic character out of which it is folly to lure him into a field of battle entirely foreign to his characteristics and environments, for no other purpose than agitation. The reason the first took to the "ballot" was from an illusion that all that was, was the result of the ballot. The slave saw his master feed the slaves, hence, he thought the slaves were supported by the master. The workman to-day kisses the hand that pays his wages and believes he is exploited as a consumer because he sees the prices go up. He sees the police, soldiers and the politicians in office come after him with "fixed bayonets," so he thinks his struggle is a political one. He does not know that like Russia the army and police is here to stay until the end of the struggle and the only way to get the best of them is by cutting off their base of supplies.

I further contend the I.W.W. is all sufficient, both as to education and force. Comrade De Leon says: "Of a piece with the court method for the peaceful settlement of disputes is the political method. The organization that rejects this method and organizes for force only, reads itself out of the pale of civilization with the practical result that, instead of seizing a weapon furnished by capitalism, it gives capitalism a weapon against itself." The impression seems to be that the

economic organization, the embryo of the coming republic, is physical force only. I take the position that it not only has the force, but all the means of educating the working class necessary, in fact, it is only through the Industrial organization that the proletariat can be educated to their true class interests. And if they go into politics the longer they are there the more befuddled they become. If they must have politics let them have it in the I.W.W. as the Socialist Republic, where a vote qualification will be had. "No producer, no voter." The worker does not need political agitation in order to reach the masses, and I believe at this stage of the game the capitalist "committees" will have their hands full suppressing agitation by the industrially organized workers. If it be the case, that agitation will be hampered, and the economic organization cannot protect itself, then how is it to protect both itself and the "fiat of the ballot"? The idea of a "general strike" entailing many hardships on the part of the working class, to defend the ballot, in my opinion is absurd. WE ARE NOT FIGHTING FOR THE PRIVILEGE OF REGISTERING OUR VOTES ON CAPITALIST BOOKS. WE ARE FIGHTING FOR BREAD AND BUTTER NOW AND OUR EMANCIPATION AS SOON AS WE ARE WELL ENOUGH organized to take charge of the various industries and operate them entirely in the interests of the workers therein. If the workers centralize their struggle for liberty on the economic field only, then his education need be very simple. Yea; he could travel the path of his class interests almost by instinct, but if he divides his fighting forces, one on the political, one on the economic, then his education will require years of study and experience to know which one of the many paths is safe for him to walk over (these remarks apply to the working class as a rule). We must remember also that only a small per cent of ANY organization must shoulder the greater part of the work and when the strength of these valiant workers is divided between two organizations it handicaps the general movement to a great extent.

As I said before, if the working class devotes its efforts to the building up of the industrial organization, the foundation of the future republic, his education need be very simple and along such as (1) Labor is the source of value, therefore should have the full product; (2) Capital does not produce value, therefore the capitalist is not entitled to any part of the product and show him how he is exploited and the

method to his emancipation as we do to-day except cut out all agitation for politics and show him the fallacy of expecting to derive benefits from political action. It appears to me that the honest workingman who would go into political action for agitation is a pure and simple borer from within as much so as the honest man who votes and agitates in the A.F. of scabs and S.P. who also works and agitates to educate the rank and file of those organizations. The result, in all three cases, is the same. Will we smash the capitalist institution of politics by boring from within or smashing from without? Let the workers do their voting in the I.W.W., a place the capitalist cannot vote. Let them do their fighting in that army and when the industries have been thoroughly organized let them move the I.W.W. in the capitol building if they so will, and if there be senators and representatives of capitalist hell there, sweep them with the rest of the rubbish into the sewer if necessary and remember it won't require a single workingman in political office from president up to dog catcher to do it, either, for the moment the source of the capitalists' existence is cut off by the industrially organized workers the dome of capitalism will crumble and fall of its own weight. In the meantime let the capitalists have the ballot all to their precious selves. Let them fill their offices with all the rotten eggs in the country, let them make the laws to their hearts' content. Yes, all the laws and fill their political citadels with law books, lawyers and jurists, too. We will rest at ease, knowing their laws and interpretation of laws will be as a bullet without force to propel it, THEIR POLITICS WILL BE IMPOTENT. It matters not how many laws or what they are, the whole question is in their ability to enforce them and their ability to enforce them depends not on their political supremacy but on their economic supremacy over the working class. It is the same with the working class whose demands will be limited only by the full product of their toil and their ability to enforce. So with these few suggestions (I could make many more but do not wish to abuse a privilege), I will say in conclusion that it is practically the same for the pioneer to attempt to be an Indian in order to capture their war councils as for the worker to be a politician in order to capture the war councils of the capitalist class; in other words, we want the pig, we will not waste energy following echoes trying to capture the squeal; when we get the pig we've got the squeal, too.

The S.L.P. undoubtedly has done and is doing a great service for the revolution

and deserves to be called the “Fighting S.L.P.” But its REAL GREAT SERVICE LIES IN ITS ECONOMIC TEACHINGS.

A little discussion on this subject will be beneficial for the members of the S.L.P. and I.W.W., myself included. We should all study it thoroughly and know the whys and wherefores and avoid taking things for granted.

J.A. La Bille.

St. Louis, Mo., December 22.

[The above is published out of excess of courtesy to the side that our correspondent holds with. The columns of *The People* were held open for a month to the matter and not one contributor to the discussion having sustained the anti-political action position the discussion was closed. Out of courtesy to views different from those of *The People* the discussion is re-opened to the extent of allowing space to the above.

ANSWER

There may be those who suppose that some slight perfidy is alloyed with our courtesy. Perhaps these are not wholly wrong. The courtesy may be perfidious that allows the great space which our correspondent takes and yet leaves unanswered the only question that is pivotal to the issue—How are the masses to be recruited and organized into capacity to take and hold if the agitation is to be conducted upon lines that wholly reject the peaceful theory of “counting noses”?

It is time wasted to point out the thorns on the political stalk. They are all admitted before hand. The question is, Is that stalk all thorns and no rose? Nor do we get any nearer to the Truth by incorrect definitions. Our correspondent’s definition of what political action embraces is woefully deficient. That is the system of “giving a dog a name and then killing him.” The rose on the stalk of “political action” is the posture it enables a man to hold by which he can preach revolution without having to do so underground; in other words, by which he can teach the economics and sociology of the Social Revolution in the open, where the masses can hear, and not in the dark, where but few can meet. The nomination of tickets together with all the routine that thereby hangs, is but an incidental—like the

making of a motion to which to speak, and without which motion being before the house, speaking degenerates into disorder. Simply to assert that the masses CAN be reached, educated and drilled for the revolution by any other process does not remove the fact that it can not be done; at any rate it does not enlighten those who hold otherwise, and who, having no hobby to save, but only a goal, the emancipation of the working class, to reach, are ever ready to learn. Assertions teach nobody.

Finally, the just compliment our correspondent pays to the “Fighting S.L.P.” should cause him to ponder and overhaul his anti-political-action views. He will have a hard time to explain how it comes about that it is the S.L.P. that has been teaching the real fighting economics, if political action is the worthless thing that he takes it for.

The theory of preaching revolution against the capitalist class only by brandishing the sword, in a country where the suffrage is in vogue, leaves unexplained the phenomenon of the unquestionable hatred that the capitalist press manifests for the S.L.P.—for that political organization that admits its impotence to carry out its program, unless the Working Class is organized into possession of the national machinery of production, in other words, that is aware of and admits the fact that it is only a shell, but the necessary shell, within which the physical force is to be hatched whereby to enforce the demands peacefully made by the ballot. The capitalist class of the land dotes upon pure and simple political Socialism (the hollow shell, without the substance); it likewise dotes upon pure and simple, or non-political Unionism (the amorphous substance, amorphous because shell-less within which the mass can grow and gather shape). For that combination that combines both shell and substance—for that combination the capitalist class, together with its pickets of all grades, has only the hatred which it manifests upon the slightest provocation for the S.L.P., and for the I.W.W. with its political clause.—ED. THE PEOPLE.]

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

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slpns@slp.org