

EDITORIAL

ROOSEVELT AND BRYAN.

By DANIEL DE LEON

WITH New Jersey swept, as was to be expected, by Col. Roosevelt at the presidential primaries, even the hitherto most cock-sure anti-Roosevelt bourgeois papers have dropped their shilly-shally concerning “T.R.’s nomination is not in the cards.” They now consider the “gravity of the situation.” They are now going further and drawing parallels between Bryan in 1896 and Roosevelt in 1912.

Bryan and Roosevelt—are these subjects for parallels? Far from it. They are subjects for contrasts.

Of course, Roosevelt, like Bryan, Bryan, like Roosevelt, are “clams, grown fast in the rock” of capitalism. Of course, to neither is the term “progressive” applicable. As far as the fundamental economic or social principles of either are concerned, they are both Conservative.

But all is not said when that is said.

Tho’ Conservative both, inasmuch as both are “clams grown fast in the rock” of capitalism, neither is a “clam grown fast in the rock” of habits of thought. Both are “clams in motion” on the social stream. But they move not in the same direction. In that lies the instructive contrast the two political personalities present.

Bryan is a conservative Reactionist; Roosevelt a conservative Revolutionist. The same proposition may, perhaps, be expressed more typically by inverting the terms:—Bryan is a reactionary Conservative; Roosevelt a revolutionary ditto.

While Bryan’s ideal is escape the ills of ripened Capitalism by a return to the days of the “Daddies,” Roosevelt’s ideal is to escape the ills by smashing the Daddies political structure and setting up another.

Bryan appeals to the recollections of the Past, Roosevelt breaks with the Past.

Bryan reactionarily strives to prop up the socio-politico structure of 140 years

ago; Roosevelt conservatively seeks to revolutionize it.

Revolution does not necessarily mean progress. There are in sociology revolutions backward, as well as revolutions forward, the same as in biology. While the conservatism of Bryan would patch up the old suit of clothes that capitalist society has worn out and burst through, the conservatism of Roosevelt would strip capitalism of its old political rig, and rig it up in new clothes—the clothes of the Dictator, the Tyrant, the Cæsar.

As there is a Bryan, so there is a Bryanism; as there is a Roosevelt, so there is a Rooseveltism.

Bryanism is dull Discontent, hence utterly illogical; Rooseveltism is angry Discontent, hence, logical enough, in a way.

While Bryanism never could succeed, Rooseveltism may. Capitalism will never fight its own economic principles. Hence, while Bryanism could not but fail because it would have brought the edifice of capitalist society down over its ears, Rooseveltism might succeed and would give capitalist society a new lease of life by rendering it Imperial.

There is a reactionary and a revolutionary Conservatism. The reasons that made the success of Bryanism impossible in 1896, is the obverse of a medal the reverse of which points to Rooseveltism as by no means an impossibility in 1912—not at all a pleasurable prospect for certain capitalist interests, however beneficial to capitalism at large.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded June 2013

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