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EDITORIAL

“IMPOSSIBLISM” FOR FAIR.

By DANIEL DE LEON

AND now comes Mr. Victor L. Berger of the whole State of Wisconsin, and, with an article in his *Social Democratic Herald* against “Impossiblism,” seeks to triturate the principle of Socialist Labor politics. Socialist Labor politics condemns the A.F. of L. as a body that cripples the mental and physical activity of the Working Class, and thereby incapacitates the Working Class to fulfill its revolutionary mission. Socialist Labor politics applauds the I.W.W. as a body that will drill the Working Class for the performance of its mission. Other people may have the capitalist for their target; the “bete noire” of Mr. Berger is the “Impossiblist.” Mr. Berger pronounces Socialist Labor politics “Impossiblism,” his servility to the A.F. of L. “Possiblism.” The method of the gentleman’s proof of his case does his argument injustice. A double column, full page long swarm of words, rather beclouds the two points that he makes; it blurs them. Reserving for next week the consideration of one of the two points,¹ we shall here take up the other. That point is that the “moral, physical and intellectual strengthening of the proletariat” is a pre-requisite for the success of Socialism—consequently Socialist Labor politics is “Impossiblism,” servility to the A.F. of L. is “Possiblism.”

As usual with the pure and simple political Socialist, or his double, the A.F. of L.-ite, the point and conclusion begs the question. It consists in assuming for granted the very thing that is disputed, and then drawing a conclusion therefrom.

Undoubtedly the moral, physical and intellectual strengthening of the proletariat is a pre-requisite for Socialist success. The thing in dispute is whether the A.F. of L. or the I.W.W. will effect that pre-requisite for the success of Socialism that consists in the “moral, physical and intellectual strengthening of the

¹ [See “Berger as Midwife, *Daily People*, August 23, 1906.]

proletariat." Socialist Labor politics holds that, so far from strengthening, the A.F. of L. weakens the pre-requisites for Socialist success, the pure and simple political Socialist as stoutly holds the contrary. The dispute turns upon facts.

In the city of New York, these very days, Typographical Union No. 6 left in the lurch the stereotypers, pressmen, firemen, etc.,—all affiliated with it in the A.F. of L.—who aimed to strike for better conditions in the Tribune Building; and the Union did so, not as a matter of whim, OR AS AN EXCEPTION, BUT AS AN A.F. OF L. RULE AND UPON A.F. OF L. PRINCIPLE.—Does that constitute {contribute?} to strengthen the moral, physical and intellectual powers of the proletariat?

In the city of Chicago, last year, the firemen, engineers, clerks and rafts of other Union men, all affiliated with the teamsters Union in the A.F. of L., left the Union in the lurch to fight its battle single-handed, and thus scabbed upon it and helped its destruction; and they did so, not as a matter of whim, or as an exception, but AS AN A.F. OF L. RULE AND UPON A.F. OF L. PRINCIPLE.—Did that contribute to strengthen the moral, physical and intellectual powers of the proletariat?

In the city of Boston in the spring of this year the Local of the International Cigarmakers' Union presented to the Employers' Association an improved bill of prices. Mr. Strasser of the A.F. of L. and a dummy were appointed by the Chicago headquarters of the Union "arbitrators" in the dispute. They "arbitrated" by siding with the employers, insulting the men, and doing all they could to interfere with the success of the strike; and they did so, not as a matter of whim, or as an exception, but UPON THE SAME PRINCIPLE AND RULE THAT CRAFT UNION LEADERS ARE SEEN TO PROCEED GENERALLY; as they proceeded this week in the trainmen and switchmen's strike on the New York, New Haven & Hartford road; as they proceeded in the subway strike in this city last year, as they proceeded in the trolley-men's strike in Albany five years ago, as they have proceeded with sickening uniformity in almost every instance where the employer has them well in hand.—Does that contribute to strengthen the moral, physical and intellectual powers of the proletariat?

In the coal regions of Pennsylvania, four years ago, the anthracite miners were on strike for living, human conditions. A coal famine threatened the land. The

popular sentiment was on the side of the men. Baer and his fellow magnates were in a pickle. The threatened sympathetic strike of the bituminous miners brought victory within the reach of the anthracite men. What averted the victory of Labor and the defeat of Capital? Mr. Mitchell's order that the bituminous men remain at work. And he did so, not as a matter of whim, or as an exception, but AS AN A.F. OF L. RULE, AND UPON A.F. OF L. PRINCIPLE.—How much did that contribute to strengthen the moral, physical and intellectual powers of the proletariat?

A.F. of L. organizers roam over the land fomenting race hatred by doping the workingman with anti-immigration dope, thereby misleading him touching the capitalist's interests and throwing dust in his eyes upon the actual internationality of capitalism; and Mr. Gompers himself, travels through the country, and, like a mystic{,} holds up to the workingman, to the workingman lashed by hunger into signing contracts,—holds up to them the "Sacredness of Contracts"; and he and they do so, not as a matter of whim, or as an exception, but AS AN A.F. OF L. RULE, AND UPON A.F. OF L. PRINCIPLE.—Does that contribute to the mental vigor of the proletariat?

Tobin, Sieverman, and John C. Chase{,} the labor lieutenants of Gompers, make contracts with shoe manufacturers not to organize the shops of competing firms; and this practice is indulged in, not as a whim or an exception, but AS AN A.F. OF L. RULE, AND UPON A.F. OF L. PRINCIPLE.—Does the rupturing of the working class contribute to their physical, mental and moral vigor?

The series could be continued indefinitely. Let us reach the climax. The A.F. of L. is affiliated with Belmont's Civic Federation. The affiliation symbolizes the "brotherhood of Capital and Labor," and the A.F. of L. trade journals, like so many vaccinators' lancets, inoculate the rank and file with the poisonous virus.—Does that help to invigorate the intellect of the proletariat?

Whether morally, physically, or mentally considered—as told by the ever lowering standard of the worker's life and his generally deep ignorance touching his class—what the A.F. of L. does is to incite, promote, nourish and cultivate just the reverse of the qualities that, indeed, are pre-requisites for the success of Socialism. Nor is this a secret. Well has the A.F. of L., together with its kindred Unions, been designated by the *Wall Street Journal* as the principal bulwark of capitalism in the

land; and, inversely, loud and furious has the yell resounded from the identical camp against the I.W.W.

The capitalist looks down sneeringly at the Socialist, and, like a drunkard staggering in his vomit, pronounces Socialism a "Utopia," thus begging the question, as if the stability of capitalism, the possibility of a pyramid standing firmly on its apex, were not a scatter-brained Utopia, or Impossibility. The pure and simple political Socialist, the bastard offspring of capitalist intellectuality, echoes by adapting the twaddle. In turn begging the question and, in turn, like a drunkard, staggering in his particular vomit, he pronounces Socialist Labor politics "Impossiblism," as if the expectation of encompassing, through Belmont-Gompers A.F. of Hellism, the "moral, physical and intellectual strengthening of the proletariat," necessary for the overthrow of the despotism of Capital, were not the most scatter-brained Impossiblism, or Utopia.

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