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EDITORIAL

## AN HISTORIC PARALLEL.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**T**HE student who looks into the heart of things as they are developing in the life of the American nation to-day, will, as he observes the forces at work therein, be struck by the close resemblance to the ferment that immediately preceded the Civil War.

For some twenty years before the War there was a peculiar mental unrest throughout all the ramifications of society, an unrest that presaged some great upheaval. The spirit of secession was in the air. Everything was splitting up, and of the fragments new things were formed. Political parties became divided, churches split asunder, then split again, scientific men were in disagreement, and literary men were at odds.

The word "rights" was on every lip. Two dozen of the different "rights" could be named off-hand: state rights, Negro rights, land rights, church rights, equal rights, sexual rights, Indian rights, woman's rights, etc., etc. Men waxed eloquent upon the right of the Negro to freedom, and other men grew warm as they advocated the right of a State to make and unmake its laws.

The Bible Communist colonies flourished, and the knave and charlatan thrived. The Methodists broke up into eight or nine sects; the Baptists divided about the same way. One sect arose to proclaim that the world was about to end, and from that sect sprang another which predicted the very day when the heavens would unroll.

Nothing seemed to escape the rage for separation. All the old anchors were loosed as hindrances to individual liberty, and freaks of every kind had their day.

Of course, there was beneath all this surface manifestation some deep and powerful underlying economic cause. In fact, it was a conflict between two economic principles as to which should rule the nation. That relic of the Middle Ages' social

system which had so long flourished in the South could not live within the commercial system that was rapidly developing in the land, nor could that commercial system grow and slavery remain. The two became locked in fierce embrace and capitalism emerged triumphant.

While the spirit of separation seemed everywhere, and endless, “the shot fired on Sumter” worked a marvelous change: The advocates of slavery, driven by their material interest, took their place; and the advocates of freedom, driven by their material interests, found where to stand—and all the other issues that had been so noisy before were hushed.

To-day, despite the press and pulpit of the lotus-eaters to the contrary, signs of great unrest are everywhere. The Republican party is in doubt and the Democratic party seems unable to profit by the predicament of the former. The Protestant churches, having lost their hold upon the people, are wondering whether a stronger Church authority is not desirable, while the old mother Church herself is confounded by the growth of the Jewish population, which for ages has had no cause to love the church of the Popes. Of late a new religious cult has grown apace.

In the economic field we have had the Trust, carrying all before it. The anti-Trust legislation recalls to mind the similar legislation that was enacted before the War. The literature of the day reeks with exposes by one side, and glows with encomiums by the other; just as fifty or sixty years ago the press was filled with the conflicting opinions of that time.

The scientific men of our time, like their predecessors, are trotted into the arena there to do the bidding of whoever may have purchased them for the time being. And so it is with the preachers, editors and professors. In the Civic Federation we see a Belmont patronizing a Gompers and from the depths of a Citizens’ Alliance we hear the ravings of a *Post* against Gompers’ trades unionism. So we might go on for columns along this line.

The revolutionary Socialist takes a look at the social barometer and reads the warning of the coming storm. Nor need he go out of his own ranks to read it. There too there is ferment. Men are put to the test, some are found wanting and a realignment of forces is sure to follow. The great rank and file of the movement are yearning for a movement one and indivisible. May they intelligently bring it about.

The engagement in Charleston harbor found the North unprepared, but she had the resources and the men. The day of like importance that finds the Socialist cause unprepared, will prove not only a day of reverse, but a day of defeat, that will come down upon us like a judgment, and it may then be too late to arouse from the trance.

The Socialist movement has gone through severe trials and has profited by them. We must yet endure the shock of many forces, for which we need all the energy, solidity and stamina of a united movement.

Workingmen of all countries unite! That slogan gathers meaning day by day.

RECONSTRUCTION.<sup>1</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> [Although signed "Reconstruction," the writing style makes it reasonably certain that De Leon is the author.—R.B.]