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EDITORIAL

WHAT'S THE OUTLOOK?

By DANIEL DE LEON

THIS office is in receipt of a letter from a Socialist party sympathizer with the Socialist Labor Party, asking a variety of questions, which themselves imply as many more, and all of which center in his final question:—"What's the outlook?"

For the benefit of *The People's* readers the question{s} will be taken up, not separately, but collectively, in the only way in which the problem they present can be handled—by going back to the first principles, and reasoning upward from them.

Economic organizations fall under two categories—the POLITICAL and the NON-POLITICAL.

A NON-POLITICAL economic organization does not contemplate the overthrow of the present social régime: it contemplates the maintenance of the present régime: it contemplates only improved conditions under which the sellers can obtain higher prices for the special merchandise they deal in, and compel lower prices for the merchandise they must buy. Associations of Free Traders to lower prices; associations of Protectionists to raise prices; Manufacturers' Associations to lower the price of the specific merchandise labor power; Gompers associations, called Craft Unions, to raise the price of the specific merchandise labor power;—all of these are alike non-political economic organizations. It matters not that Manufacturers' Associations and Gompers associations come before political party conventions with planks to be inserted or kept out. That does not change their non-political character. At bottom Gompers and Van Cleave are at one—"labor power is a merchandise, and of right must remain so." This simple, yet pregnant fact stamps their respective organizations "non-political." Whether or not they avail themselves of "political action," the one to beat down the price of labor power, the other to raise it, does not alter matters. So long as Gompers holds Capital and Labor to be

Brothers, he can consistently hold to his motto: "No Politics in the Union," however frequently he dance attendance upon—mark!—upon CAPITALIST political party conventions. Such attendance is in keeping with his organization which does not aim at the overthrow, but at the upholding of the capitalist social régime.

A POLITICAL economic organization does contemplate the overthrow of the present social régime. The simple, but pregnant fact of its ultimate aim stamps such an organization "political." It is this fact that misleads some honest, though reckless, Anarchists to say and believe that the use of dynamite also is "political action." The charge may be made against the poverty of language, in that it compels the use of the word "political" in different senses according to the words that it is coupled with. However that may be, the Movement is not bothering with creating a new language. Usage renders the word "political" perfectly clear in whatever term it appears. The economic organization that aims at the overthrow of the capitalist system is "political" in that it has a political aim. Hence the I.W.W. is a political economic organization.

Arrived so far, another line of thought must be taken up.

No more than in biology is there in sociology such a thing as hard and fast lines of demarkation. In sociology, as in biology, formations shade into each other. The fact that the non-political economic organization of Gompers consists of workingmen gives it a special stamp. However blind, however iniquitous towards other workingmen in the attempt to keep the jobs to themselves; however scabby even towards one another;—nevertheless, the fact that the Gompers non-political economic organization consists of workingmen mainly compels it, when facing the capitalist, to strike a posture that, despite itself, leans toward the political. The workingman can not breathe, in his relations towards the capitalist, without he shakes or threatens to shake the capitalist régime. This fact has for its consequence that the NON-POLITICAL economic organization of Labor borders on the POLITICAL economic organization of the I.W.W. The chasm between the two is not an unbridgeable one.

What's the outlook?

1. Capitalist development, which plows the field for Socialist thought, is bound, in America, first, to counteract the work of the labor lieutenants of capitalism in the

craft Unions; next, to push and dissolve these unions into the I.W.W.

2. Capitalist development will be immensely aided in this work by the boring from without done by the I.W.W., and by S.L.P. propaganda.

3. That identical capitalist development is bound to cleanse the I.W.W. of all taint of dynamitism.

4. Harmful to Industrialism as is the conduct of Trautmann, which so much distresses our correspondent, it cannot be fatal. It is true he has “given less thought to build up the I.W.W. than to try and break down the S.L.P.,” the strongest propagandist of Industrial Unionism in the land; it is true he has “intrigued with discredited soreheads in the S.L.P. to encompass his ill-advised purpose”; it is true he “has debauched the *Bulletin*”; it is true his going so far as to approach the S.L.P. National Committeeman for Wisconsin, Schnabel, with the suggestion that he get out of the S.L.P. was “an act of insanity”; it is true that such conduct “inevitably encourages ‘veiled’ and ‘unveiled’ dynamitism” and encouraged materially the “pure and simple politicians of the S.P. to prevent unity with the S.L.P.” All this is true, and much more that could be added, and it is true that all this may “prove fatal to the present organization of the I.W.W.” But our correspondent errs when he fears it will prove fatal to Industrial Unionism. If the I.W.W. should prove too indolent to straighten itself, of course, the I.W.W. will collapse—but not Industrial Unionism. That identical capitalist development which is ever plowing the field for Socialism is bound, with the fearless and indomitable aid of S.L.P. propaganda, to bring to life that economic organization of the working class, “without which the political victory will be indefinitely postponed.”

No cause for despondency. The Capitalist Class is the faithful handmaid of the Social Revolution. The future is ours, who knows how soon!—provided we learn TO LABOR AND TO WAIT.

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

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