

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 9, NO. 253.

NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10, 1909.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

THE PROBLEM AND TASK.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE Nome, Alaska, *Industrial Worker*, organ of the Nome Miners' Union, affiliated with the Western Federation of Miners, devotes a sympathetic article to the lamentable fracas that has virtually dissolved the I.W.W., leaving, of the once national and promiscuous organization, nothing but such "I-am-a-Bums" flotsam and jetsam, as one hears of occasionally here and there, with a Spokane lodging-house as real headquarters, and a sturdy band, with New York for headquarters, that holds aloft, above the wreck on the industrial field, the banner of Industrial Unionism.

Our sympathetic contemporary in Nome does not despair of the future—that's well. All the same, its diagnosis of the disease savors of Bewilderment—a state of mind perilously close to Despair. An opinion that correctly refers to intolerable "autocracy" at the once headquarters, and from that throws the blame upon something that must have been "lacking in the construction" of the organization—such an opinion is the child of Bewilderment, a state of mind that the startling object lesson furnished by the fracas might well justify, but which we should all guard against. The object lesson is pregnant with instruction.

The staunchest of crews could hardly do more than, if it could do as much as, save its life upon a loosely jointed, crazy raft. On the other hand, to turn turtle is the almost inevitable fate of the staunchest and best jointed craft manned by a crazy crew.

The experience made by the I.W.W. supplements the store of practical information which the A.F. of L. has been contributing to the Labor Movement.

Robust ignorance will prevent Progress; persisted in it will cause retrogression. The contribution of the A.F. of L. to the Labor Movement is the loud warning that the body that persists in ignorance is bound to fall behind. A.F. of L. benightedness

is sinking the wheels of its chariot into ever deeper ruts, and, consequently, corruption.

A little knowledge crazes little heads. The identical little heads who, within the fold of the A.F. of L. and kindred organizations, caught not the faintest ray of light, or, if they did, were otherwise surrounded with two heavy banks of darkness for the glimmerings which they caught to make them lose their base, these identical little heads lost their equilibrium in the I.W.W., and, when advanced to office, grew so top-heavy that they stood upon their heads. Names are superfluous. They will occur to all who are posted. The contribution of the I.W.W. to the Labor Movement is the equally loud warning that a crazy crew in charge of the best of ships will make it turn turtle, and likewise land in corruption.

Movements make men; the Movement is greater than any man in it. All this is true, and must never be lost sight of. But this other is true also—Movements are of men: without the right men, no Movement. The two principles must be held together.

The joint contribution of the A.F. of L. and the I.W.W. to the practical experience of the economic Movement is—

Do not, on your life, organize first and educate afterwards: educate first and organize afterwards. Such has been the baneful effect of pure and simple policy that, if you organize first, then one of two things will happen—

Either the leaden weight of pure and simpledom will be too heavy to overcome, and relapse will be certain;

Or, lightweights are sure to turn up at the top, like small potatoes in a shaken barrel, and, adding to the fatuousness of pure and simpledom that they bring along the vainglory which comes from a glimmer of freshly acquired and undigested knowledge, fly off the handle.

—In either case disaster, not unaccompanied with corruption.

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

Uploaded July 2010

slpns@slp.org