

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 10, NO. 112.

NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 1909.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

REVOLUTIONARY GYMNASTICS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE French have a happy knack of getting up apposite terms. The term “revolutionary gymnastics” is one of these, and of recent coinage.

By the term is meant the more or less “general strikes” which are inspired by the spirit of discontent; which, during their conduct, develop the vision, extend it, and enable the participants to perceive clearer and clearer the goal to which they have been unconsciously aiming; which, as they progress and are practiced, render the participants experter in methods, and more experienced in practical work. In short, by the term “revolutionary gymnastics” is meant the economic manifestations that promote class-consciousness.

Of late, the “revolutionary gymnastics” have been rather frequent occurrences. There was the gymnastics of the Parisian postal employes; then came the gymnastics of the Spanish general strike manifestations against War; before that was over the gymnastics of the general strike in Sweden against the attempted infringement of the right to organize broke out; and, the Swedish gymnastics being yet on their have followed in the course of last week a number of such local gymnastics, participated in by several industrial centers of Italy, Austria, France and Belgium in demonstration against the assassination of Francisco Ferrer.

That there is much in these “gymnastics” was obvious from the start. For one thing they are unavoidable, and they are cheering signs; for another, they are desirable. Only experience can teach many a thing that theory does not cover: only practice can make perfect.

These “gymnastics” are first class teachers. They teach, on the one hand, the necessity of Socialist action to clear the way for them: this part of the instruction is administered to the rank and file of the proletariat—the infantry of the revolutionary army. They teach, on the other hand, the necessity of the economic

organization as the physical force, necessary to execute the revolutionary act and thereby carry out the announcement made by the revolutionary Socialist ballot, and which the ballot alone can make: this part of the instruction is administered to the “captains of hundreds” in the Labor Movement.

That the rank and file of the proletariat are taking to heart the teachings of the “revolutionary gymnastics,” the signs are numerous. The proletariat is everywhere falling away from the parties of capital and taking independent political shape.

That the “captains of hundreds,” despite their former sneers, are also taking to heart the teachings of the “revolutionary gymnastics” the signs are likewise numerous, some of the signs are positively striking. Sixteen years ago, at the Zurich International Socialist Congress, the talented Karl Kautsky ridiculed the idea of the “general strike” with the neatly contrived sentence: “When the general strike becomes possible it has ceased to be necessary.” This year, only sixteen years later, Kautsky has materially dropped his one-time theory. In the *Neue Zeit* of last August 27, he refers to the late action of the Swedish workers as “their glorious general strike.”

“Revolutionary gymnastics” are not the tumblings of clowns: they are the rehearsals of the actors in the great historic drama of our generation, on the world-wide stage of the Socialist Movement.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded December 2010

slpns@slp.org