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EDITORIAL

THE LOS ANGELES MAYORALTY.

By DANIEL DE LEON

AT the late October primaries in Los Angeles the Socialist party candidate for Mayor, Job Harriman, led his nearest opponent, the Top-Capitalist Alexander, with 20,183 votes, to the latter's 16,790; along with him came the rest of the S.P. municipal candidates with large votes entitling them, like the head of their ticket, to enter the election race of the 5th of this month. At that final contest, Alexander, together with the rest of his municipal ticket, was returned at the top of the polls, while the S.P. candidate and fellow runners are buried under a majority, estimated at not less than 35,000 and possibly 50,000.

What brought about so signal an overturn?

The circumstance that, since the primaries, the suffrage was extended to women does not answer the question. Theoretically at least, the 20,183 men, who voted the S.P. ticket at the primaries, had as large a contingent of female connections as the 16,790 who voted for Alexander. Moreover, seeing that the S.P. claimed to be the party of Labor, it, more so than its non-Labor opponent, should be expected to have been furnished with a larger voting constituency by the successful woman suffrage amendment to the constitution. This notwithstanding the S.P. turn-down was startling.

The question comes back—What brought about so signal an overturn?

Los Angeles press despatches of December 3, two days after the McNamara “confessions,” contained a casual paragraph that is pregnant with meaning, and luminously points to the answer. The paragraph is: “So great was the number of Harriman buttons swept up in the streets last night that official mention was made of the fact to the Police Department.” Hardly an occurrence is recallable that is so many-sidedly sociologic.

The S.P. Los Angeles mayoralty campaign was conducted along the S.P. beaten

path of skimming the surface of Sentiment. It was Sentiment of the Reform pattern. As such it appealed with special force to two elements—the Middle Class and the caricature of these, the class-unconscious wage slave. Crushed down by the remorseless law of their own social system, the middle class capitalist, “in rebellion” against consequences, is a kite without a tail gyrating in the social breeze, while the class-unconscious wage slave makes a sorrowful yoke-fellow of the “rebellious” middle class man.

These two elements, any one of which, certainly the two combined, greatly outnumber the Top-Capitalist, the S.P. campaigner everywhere addresses himself to in manner and style best calculated to cancel their numbers by unfitting them for the militant work that Socialism demands. Bent upon vote-catching, that is, vote-wheedling only, the S.P. campaigner everywhere echoes back to them the superstitions of the elements whose vote he fishes for—to the “rebellious” middle class he promises “good government” and “low taxes,” to the class-unconscious wage slave he promises “higher wages” and “cheap living.” It was notably so in Los Angeles where Job Harriman was placarded as “The Abe Lincoln of To-day” and the candidate of the “Business Men’s League.”

For a while, and only for a while, this sort of thing will float. The time is bound to come, eventually if not sooner, when the sunken rocks of sociologic facts are run upon, and then there is shipwreck. This is what happened in Los Angeles, through the McNamara “confessions.”

The McNamara Episode—whether the McNamaras are guilty or not—was a ball thrown by the Genius of the Social Revolution into the hands of the Los Angeles S.P. campaigner. He muffed the ball. Instead of utilizing the incident to shake the mentality of the Los Angeles wage slaves free from the shackles of their middle class concepts of Unionism, the Los Angeles S.P. campaigner took a posture that tended to fetter the wage slaves more firmly to their economic, social and craft Unionistic superstitions. The Los Angeles S.P. campaigner jumped upon McNamara’s back, thus making the Gompers Civic-Federationized and Militia-of-Christized craft Unionist the carrier of his philosophy of Socialism. The act placed the trump card of the campaign into the foe’s hands—and the foe, now stupidly railed at by the S.P. for playing that trump, was not ass enough to abstain from playing the card. He did

play it—and down came the McNamaras, carrying down to ruin the endorsee of the “Business Men’s League.”

There is no element more scattery at critical junctures in our social conflicts than the middle class in “rebellion” and, along with them, of course, their “intellectuals,” and their headless camp-followers the discontented, class-unconscious wage slave. The sands of the desert, now blown into a towering mound, and as quickly blown apart to the four quarters of the compass, are not a circumstance to the component elements of the bunch. Witness the great numbers of Harriman buttons,” which,—had they been worn by trained militants, would have stuck all the faster to the lapel of the coats of the wearers, and been productive of many more such—the moment the transparent comedy of the McNamara “confessions” and “compromises” was enacted, were hopelessly, despondently and timidly cast off to be “swept up in the streets” like so much offal.

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