

DAILY PEOPLE



VOL. 12, NO. 175.

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 22, 1911.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

WAHNETAS.

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THE recent article published in these columns on "The Wahneta"—a secret, oath-bound organization within the International Typographical Union—has evoked a multitude of questions and comment. From all of these the conclusion flows that the "Wahneta" is considered something unique, and uniquely perverse.

Of course the "Wahneta" is not an ethical organization; it is not a body for the promotion of altruism; its purpose is not the uplift of the human race. The "Wahneta" is none of these. Far from it. All the same, to look upon the "Wahneta" as something "uniquely perverse" is to miss the point.

For one thing, it is not imaginable that the International Typographical Union enjoys the unique distinction of having evolved a "Wahneta." Undoubtedly, there is not a craft Union of any "standing"—age, numbers and treasury—without its "Wahneta," whatever the name the thing may go under. For another thing, "pervereness" is neither the purpose nor the motive spring of the "Wahnetas."

"Wahnetas" belong to the genus of the Fraternal Order, recently analyzed in these columns. They are distant cousins of the convents and monasteries of old, and even of most of our own generation.

The spawn of the embrace of Disturbed Social Conditions and Ignorance is the organization of men into bodies for self-protection, at the expense of others.

The tumultuous condition of things in the Middle Ages, where life was precarious, a living still more so, coupled with total ignorance of social laws, gave birth to the Convent—a haven of refuge for the refugees, who, not infrequently, as illuminated by one of La Fontaine's cleverest fables, shoved off, of course to destruction, all further would-be refugees, on the same principle that shipwrecked mariners shove off into the deep all others whose admission to the already overcrowded life-

boat might endanger the lives of those within.

The wild jungle social conditions, that capitalist society, again coupled with denseness concerning social affairs, breed{s}, breed, in turn, the Fraternal Order with the aid of which the members seek security, and falsely imagine they can escape the howling wolf without.

It is exactly so, only within a more limited sphere, with the "Wahnetas." Nursed on the teat of dense economic ignorance, experiencing at every turn the ineffectiveness of craft Union "principles," disillusioned day after day regarding expectations upon which they had banked, and all the while feeling tighter and tighter the grip of harder times, select geniuses among the membership of craft Unions foregather—in a sort of Convent—in a sort of Fraternal Order—into a sort of life-boat on the rainy waves of social evolution within their own Union, and seek safety, of course, and necessarily so, at the expense of the membership at large.

While the "Wahnetas" must be fought as appendices of the respective capitalist employers, the "Wahnetas" should be noted. They are among the loudest of warnings against the bandage that Civic Federations and Militias of Christ seek to tie before {the} class eye of the working class.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded November 2012

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