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EDITORIAL

FRATERNITY AND POLITICS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE “small sized hornets’ nest,” which, according to the Salem, Mass., *Evening News* of last October 23, was stirred in that town at the annual banquet of the F.O.E.,¹ a fraternal organization, when one of the banqueters introduced politics by recommending the election of two of the members of the Order to some petty office or other, is one of the many signals that the storm, which originally caused the building of “fraternal” organizations, is reaching the stage of intensity which tends to destroy what at first it gave birth to.

“Fraternal” organizations are a sort of private insurance companies—mutual benefit associations with the aid of which the members seek to benefit one another economically and, of course, politically also. As one of the banqueters at the Salem gathering put it: “there was no need of anyone’s calling attention to the matter of politics”: of course not: politics go without saying. As another one of the banqueters expressed it, membership in the Order was an “investment,” a “good investment.” The “fraternal” organization is in the nature of a defensive and offensive clanship. The goals it looks to are purely material—like the goal of monasteries and convents—and, like these, which cloak themselves in “religion,” the “fraternal” organization cloaks itself in “fraternity.” The burden of the song, or, to use a not very elegant expression, “the milk in the ‘fraternal’ cocoanut,” is bread, raiment and shelter, with, of course, politics as a frequently useful lever.

It needs no very extensive historic reading to scent social distressfulness in the cropping up of such bodies, and, along with them, a sinking of the popular tone.

When things are going well, or normally, material interests divide along broad lines into large aggregations. When, however, things cease to be going well, when the state of things becomes abnormal, then petty segregations come to life—and

¹ [Fraternal Order of Elks.—*Editor.*]

petty also become their aims. The members of the large bodies, into which normally material conditions divide a population, aim, economically, at means of affluence, and, politically, at large prizes such as Senatorships and Presidencies. The members of the petty clanships, called “fraternal orders,” aim, economically, at bones to gnaw at, and, politically, at petty office. Strife after large prizes exalt rather than otherwise, and the prospect of gaining these holds the contestants together. Strife after petty gains degrade rather than exalt; motives become sordid; and “small sized hornets’ nests” prelude disintegration.

The starting storm drives little birds to flock to shelter; when the storm grows into a hurricane the little birds are shaken out into the “weather.” The starting of the capitalist storm, to the breath of which the “fraternal Orders” owed their existence, is beginning to knock the breath out of them.

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