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EDITORIAL

FREE SPEECH AND PRESS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THERE is matter for much profitable rumination in the editorial “Not Guilty” of the Los Angeles *Municipal News* of the 29th of last month.

As readers of the *Daily People* are aware, the municipal administration of Los Angeles founded, by referendum, a municipal paper, entitled the *Municipal News*. As readers of the *Daily People* are also aware, the *Municipal News* allotted a column to each of the leading parties in the municipality—the Republican, the Democratic, the Good Government, the Socialist, and the Socialist Labor Party—, each column being in charge of an appointee of the respective party organization in the city.

The move was in keeping with the traditions of the best, of that spirit of the Bourgeois Revolution that is lasting.

Altho’—as a revolution that supplanted one ruling class, in that instance the feudal, with another ruling class, the bourgeois,—the Bourgeois Revolution in America left economic oppression extant, it, nevertheless, introduced free speech and free press. The class nature of the American Bourgeois Revolution is a temporary affair; a sort of rung up the ladder of Progress, that is to be left behind and cast off by the Socialist or Industrial Revolution. The conquest of the freedom of speech and of the press, like the conquest of the suffrage, is, on the contrary, a lasting conquest, one of the great contributions of the Bourgeois Revolution to the Cause of Human Emancipation. The Los Angeles *Municipal News*, altho’, legitimately enough, the organ of a bourgeois government grounded on wage-slavery, was, to its credit, no less true to the better part of the Bourgeois Revolution, when it allotted a column to all the leading political parties, its own political enemies included.

Now, then, it transpires from the editorial above referred to that an anonymous correspondent, “L.M.,” of *The Tribunal* charged the *Municipal News* with being “un-

fair and insincere, and wilfully so” on the ground that the *Municipal News* permits the Socialist Labor Party to hold and maintain equal space on the “Party Politics” page with the other political organizations that qualified for the page.

Of course, the *Municipal News* had no difficulty to prove itself “not guilty” of the charge of wilful unfairness and insincerity, and to turn the tables upon “L.M.” The ordinance that established the paper prescribed specifically that, in order to qualify for a column, a party must poll more than three per cent. of the total vote cast in the city at the last preceding state election or municipal primary election. The total vote of all the parties in Los Angeles at the last municipal primary election was 811,714. The total vote of the S.L.P. which had a full ticket of 20 candidates, many of whom, notably its candidates for city attorney, for council, etc., ran markedly strong in comparison with the head of the ticket, was 29,871, or 3.68 per cent.—more than required to give it a column in the municipal paper. And with the figures and facts the *Municipal News* read “L.M.” a deserved lecture on fairness and the wrongfulness of misstatement.

It is not difficult to penetrate the anonymous mask of “L.M.,” and detect the profile of the Socialist party’s Officialdom-and-Press.

So doing, the pregnant sight is brought into relief of a party, that claims to be THE representative of International Socialism, THE apostle of human freedom in the land, not merely proceeding from unascertained facts, not merely indulging in reckless calumny—to all that one is accustomed from the said Officialdom-and-Press—but endeavoring to muzzle the press, in other words. endeavoring to cap the blinkers to the eyes of the public, to turn the public into dray-horses for whom it is not good that they see more than their masters think it is good for them to see.

This is a pregnant sight, indeed. It is a sight that flashes the light ahead into the grave, and back into the cradle of the said Officialdom-and-Press. It is, furthermore, a sight that illumines the otherwise unexplainable present. It illumines the hand-in-glove relations that exist between the Officialdom-and-Press of the S.P. and the Anarch “notabilities” of the notoriously anti-free press and speech I’m-a-bummery, who usurp and thereby disgrace the name of the I.W.W., and one of whom prances on the National Executive Committee of the S.P. The posture of “L.M.” explains why the Officialdom-and-Press of the S.P., after having waged fierce

battle against the I.W.W. when the I.W.W. waved the true colors of Socialism, wheeled around and made common cause with the set that usurped the name the instant that set began to show its colors by suppressing *The People* from their reading room and following up their anti-free press instincts with anti-free speech endeavors to terrorize the S.L.P and bona fide I.W.W. men into silence with the fist.

The sight of the Los Angeles *Municipal News*, a bourgeois paper, reading a lesson to "L.M.," and condignly castigating the worthy, is a luminous page from up-to-date history.

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