

THE PEOPLE.

VOL. I, NO. 20.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, AUGUST 16, 1891.

PRICE 3 CENTS.

THE ENEMY IN SIGHT.

On several occasions during the last few months, the otherwise even tenor of the proceedings in the New York Central Labor Federation has been disturbed. That unity at the ballot box was as essential as unity in the shop; that the demand for higher wages, lower hours, in short, human conditions, was one with the demand for socialist institutions; that the scab in the political, was no less foul a being than the scab in the economic field; that via socialist political agitation and action alone lay the emancipation of the proletariat—these were the fundamental principles upon which the Federation was built, they constituted its salient features, and marked out its specific course. A long experience, practical and theoretical, had demonstrated their soundness. It was not without struggle the superstructure was reared on those foundations. Once reared, the work of progress was carried on with a slow yet steady pace.

Suddenly a furious onslaught was made upon this organic law of the Federation. Strangely, it proceeded, ostensibly, from the bakers—thitherto, among the most thoroughly socialist elements of labor, whose national convention had even condemned, in unmistakable language, the conduct of President Gompers in excluding the Socialists from the Detroit Convention. Inquiry, however, soon showed that the rank and file of the bakers had been grievously practised upon, and that the methods used to induce their seeming defection were of the sort in vogue during the wild and woolly days of the West. No attempt at anything deserving the name of argument had been used with them. In the stead of argument, which predicates knowledge, calumny{,} which predicates self-interest, if not also malice, had been employed. One Henry Weissmann, an irresponsible personage from California, who had filled that ignoble mission, also led the onslaught. History, in short succession, repeated itself three times. He was signally routed in each instance. Failing within, the cabal was conducted without the Federation, and a circular was recently issued—a veritable travesty on

economics and history—calling for the formation of another central body directly hostile to the Federation.

From the start, it was evident the assault against the Federation was, in fact, an assault against socialism, instigated by those “conservative” elements, whose impure aims were balked by the presence of the Socialist Labor party in that body—a circumstance, that, like the turning on of the gas at spiritualist seances destroys the chances for hocus-pocus, destroyed the chances for political sleights of hand. The light, fishy material, that constituted the center of opposition, hardly deserved notice except when it ventured into close quarters, and even its latest step in calling for the formation of a hostile central body was not entitled to greater recognition. Up to, and including that stage, the affair, annoying though it was, was insignificant, hardly more than a tempest in a tea-pot. One thing only could give it weight and entitle it to our powder. That thing, absent until now, has at last occurred.

Of all metropolitan capitalistic papers, none so thoroughly understands the Labor Movement, especially the conditions of its existence, as does the *New York Staats Zeitung*. From the *Sun* down to the *Evening Post*, its English contemporaries have as yet but a very vague notion of the import of the movement; they fret, it is true, over its present manifestations but lack the requisite experience to appreciate the significance of the daily occurrences in the camp of labor. Otherwise the *Staats Zeitung*. It derives from Germany a rich store of information on the question. Whatever may occur here and now, has occurred in Germany years ago. The stage now traversed by the Labor Movement in America is one with which the German is thoroughly familiar. He knows that the movement, whose rising swell is drowning monarchy and capitalism in Germany, has grown in proportion to the understanding by the masses of their distinct class features, and of their application of this understanding at the hustings by excluding all parties, but their own, from their councils. To the experienced eye of the *Staats Zeitung* the movement to cripple the Federation could not pass unperceived. To see was to comprehend. It straightway reached the hand to its natural allies—if it had not done so before—and in its transport of job it, last Thursday, applauds and cheers them on in an article bearing the significant title: “On the Right Path,” and which commences with these words, everyone of which

seems to burst with gladness: “*For the purpose of stemming the Socialist tendencies which prevail in the Central Labor Federation, Bakers’ Union No. 7, Clothing Cutters’ Union No. 4 and the United Garment Workers of America have issued a call, etc.*”

The rejoicings of the *Staats Zeitung*, which were soon taken up by other capitalist papers, are premature; indeed, they are doomed to disappointment. But certain as this is, eternal vigilance remains the price of liberty. The issue is now clear. Capitalism, the hereditary enemy, worth all the powder we can afford, has itself taken the field and is now in full sight. The scales must now drop from the eyes of the deluded ones, who, until recently, allowed themselves to be trepanned. Now let every Socialist, who is a man and not a traitor to his class, jump and stand to his guns.

[Transcribed by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded February 2002]