

Daniel De Leon

Editorial: The Old, Old Tune

Brother James R. Sovereign, the present editor of the *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, has an article in its issue of the 28th of last month in which he claims that Socialists “made a mistake” in not taking sides on the bond and money issues. By failing to do so, he tries to prove, Socialists defeat their own ends, “ditch their train,” and so forth through a great variety of metaphors and sundry anecdotes.

It would well repay the trouble of taking up each of these metaphors and anecdotes. They are all structurally defective, hence their examination would aid greatly in revealing the misconceptions that exist in some minds on the mechanism of capital, thereby aiding the understanding of the problem and the perception of the correct method to solve it. We shall, however, put that interesting inquiry off to the following issues of THE PEOPLE, and address ourselves to-day simply to the main feature of our brother editor’s arguments.

The gist thereof is this:

“The ultimate aims of Socialism are not only noble but sound. The labor problem cannot be solved without the abolition of the wages system and the establishment of the Co-operative Commonwealth. Nevertheless, while moving thither there are important reforms that must be accomplished, and the neglecting of which is fatal.”

This view of the case is based on two ideas, to wit:

First, that palliatives can to-day afford relief; and,

Second, that—in the argument in question—financial and national bond reforms would afford the wished-for relief.

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Both these views are errors.

In the first place, no relief whatever can come from bond or financial reform to the overwhelming majority, the leading class of our people—the wage earner or proletariat. This we have again and again proved with facts and conclusions, and in no instance have objectors tackled these facts; they simply reiterate their baseless opinions. Coin money as plentiful as blackberries in Fall, and only that class will get it that already is in possession of land and machinery. The larger the per capita of circulating medium, the larger will be the wealth of the capitalist class; the wage earner will remain a wage slave, and the middle class will sink down into wage slavery, unable to compete with the monster machinery of production now owned by private hands. Again, so long as the machinery of production and the land are in private hands, i.e., so long as capital is in force, all questions of taxes are snares and delusions. Elemental studies on political economy and sociology prove this position beyond peradventure.

In the second place, even though at an earlier stage of capitalism palliatives might have been available, they are not so now. If to-day the earnings of the wage slave are not lowered by a mortgage on graveyards, they will be lowered by some other of a thousand and one schemes. Under capitalism the wage earner is an economic slave of the capitalist. Nor could the capitalist wish for anything better than to have the wage earner fritter away his energies trying to stop individual pimples on the capitalist social system. As fast as one pimple was suppressed another would crop up. The wage earner, and the labor leader, who does not understand this, is a squirrel in a wheel, always whirring, always moving, but never moving forward.

The labor movement commences with this squirrel jig and chasing of pimples. But the Socialists, fortunately for civilization, insist upon making the “mistake” of refusing to chase pimples or to emulate the squirrel. He knows that nothing can now stand short of the social revolution that shall

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overthrow the capitalist system, and to that he devotes all his energies.

The call for “palliatives,” “life preservers,” “one thing first,” and what not, is an old, old tune, now cracked and with a whizz. The Socialists throughout the world have heard it tooted through the fish horn of “Know-nothingism” here, on “Anti-Semitism” elsewhere, through the shrill pipe of “Single-Taxism,” through the fog horn of “Good Government,” etc., etc., and now it is resounding in several countries through the penny whistle of “financial” and kindred reforms. But one and each has died away upon the still air of oblivion, and so will the present one; in fact, it is dying away now. While the squarely planted columns of Socialism alone are marching forward, keeping tread to the swelling notes of victory—while everything else, without exception, is going to smash, only the Socialist army is growing and gathering strength.

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