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EDITORIAL

A LESSON IN FREEDOM, AND OTHER THINGS.

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LAST Sunday, a meeting of Russians being in progress at 49 Henry street in this city, to form plans for aiding the popular uprising that is reported from Russia, someone suddenly cried: "Kill the spies!" Immediately everyone's fist was on his neighbor's nose. Pandemonium reigned for a while; and then a stampede from the hall followed.

"Tyranny!" "Dictatorship!" "Intolerance!"—such are some of the epithets frequently hurled at the Socialist Labor Party for the discipline it enforces in its ranks, the caution it exercises in the selection of its membership, and the firmness with which it condemns all unfit material. The hurlers of these epithets are not all dishonest men. Many of them are of an Arcadian frame of mind. Socialism wants happiness, freedom, peace, justice for all? "Therefore," so reason these innocents, "let's now set the example of all these qualities in our practice: let's be broad; let's be tolerant; don't let's suspect men; let's disregard red-tape; let's embrace the whole people."

It was upon these principles and tactics that the meeting of 49 Henry street was convened. The result was inevitable. However childishly ideologic a man may be, he carries, unconscious to himself, a certain degree of reasoning power. His ideology may be excessive enough to bear down and silence the voice of common sense, that suggests the absurdity of practising "freedom," "broadness," "confidence" at the dynamic stage of the movement, while stiving to organize, so as to march upon an oppressor and overthrow him. But excessive though such ideology may be, it is not always on its guard, can be taken unawares; and when that happens, the suppressed promptings of common sense leap forward; childish confidence is then supplanted by childish fear. One sort of insanity succeeds another. And this is what happened at 49 Henry street.

With the exception of the firm-in-the-saddle Socialist element among them, the Russian, as well as all other European revolutionary elements in America, are in

the main marked with Arcadian senselessness, they are childish and visionary in their aspirations, and above all in their methods. Of such was essentially the element that gathered at 49 Henry street. They were “broad,” they were “tolerant,” they were “loving.” The bare thought of taking precautions for the safety of their meeting would have been scorned as unfit for a set of men “aiming at the broadest democracy.” Russian spies, of course, were broad enough to avail themselves of the opportunity. Possibly, only one agent of the Russian secret police was there. He was ample. He himself set up the cry: “Kill the spies!”—and his work was done to perfection. The insanity of foolish confidence was instantaneously put to flight by its twin sister, foolish alarm. The panic blinded those present. Each saw a spy in his neighbor, and flew at him. The meeting broke up in wild disorder.

Good intentions, unballasted by reason, degenerate into illusions; and illusions are the weapons that a crafty foe ever seizes with predilection to crack the skulls of its moon-calf adversaries with.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
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