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EDITORIAL

“AGENTS CONSERVATEURS.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE two documents, published elsewhere in this issue, are of priceless value to every serious man now in the Movement, or who contemplates joining. The second—the secret circular of The Corporations Auxiliary Company—supplements the first and calls for no warning to understand its import. Not so with the first—the pamphlet entitled *Machine Politics and Organized Labor*. Being a pamphlet, issued by Mr. Lucius E. Whiton, a capitalist who is grooming himself for Mayor of New London, Ct., the reader is under strong temptations to scrutinize the writer’s motives. To do so, however, would be to miss the point. It matters not whether Mr. Whiton is an innocent capitalist of the childish breed that imagines there is an occult alchemy in the American Eagle, potent enough to counteract and upset the laws of political economy and sociology; or whether the gentleman is one of the up-to-date capitalists with guile, a sort of Connecticut “Golden Rule Jones”; nor yet whether he is a cross between these two extremes. All that, together with the motives for his issuing the pamphlet, is of comparatively little moment. The important thing is the fact that the documents embodied in the pamphlet established beyond doubt, to wit, that capitalist concerns have their paid agents in the unions—among officers, among delegates and among the rank and file—to safeguard the interests of capital.

It is not yesterday, nor the day before that the Socialist Labor Party sounded the note of warning on the “friendly relations” existing between the “labor leaders” and capitalist magnates, or on the significance of the conduct of some men of the rank and file. When these alleged unionists were regularly seen to get political jobs; when they were seen even to talk on the “conservative” side, which means on the side of capital, it was obvious that they were paid for the work, that they were agents of the capitalist class. It followed that the organizations thus poisoned by

them could not choose but stand in the way of progress. The hypodermic injections of “conservatism” that these bodies were subjected to had to lame their activity in the cause of Labor. All this was obvious. But the exact facts were not known. Mr. Whiton’s pamphlet furnishes them. The letters he publishes of the Corporations Auxiliary Company now give in detail the facts formerly only surmised.

These revelations are timely. To the intelligent reader they settle once for all the mooted question of tactics with regard to organization: they settle the question of “broadness,” they settle the question of “intolerance”: they point to the necessity of S.L.P. methods.

The European spy system of “agents provocateurs,” fire-eaters who incite to riot, is played out: these gentry can now be easily detected. The American system of laming the striking arm of the working class by means of paid agents who talk “conservatism” is something new. It seems more insidious and it is; but here also the toad carries a precious jewel on his head.

Different from {the} “agent provocateur,” what might be called the “agent conservateur” points to correct tactics. The tolerance, once thought advisable towards ill constructed labor bodies, proves itself only a screen for these “agents conservateurs.” Where a labor body is correctly constructed, the “agent conservateur” can not open his mouth without proclaiming his mission. Impossible it is to keep these spies out. Capitalism controls wealth enough to bribe individuals in all Labor bodies. Let it bribe! Its spies can find out nothing, for there is nothing to be “found out”: a properly constructed Labor body carries on its agitation and education above board, in the open: its premises, its conclusions, its aspirations are all openly proclaimed as becomes the nobility of its mission: the capitalist would but waste his money in spies to find out what he could find out without, what the Labor body is anxious that all should know, and know well. It is not as a spy that these lackeys or lieutenants of capitalism can serve their masters. It is as misleaders of Labor. This is serious, but in this all properly constructed Labor bodies can foil the foe. Unyielding “intolerance” for “conservatism” disarms the “agent conservateur.” Nothing else can; while that smokes the vermin to death, and alone preserves free the striking, that is the educational and organizing arm of the Social Revolution.

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