

The People.

VOL. IX.—NO. 38.

HENRY KUHN, NAT'L SEC'Y, S.L.P.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17, 1899

PRICE 2 CENTS.

FIRST EDITORIAL

NO IDOLATRY.

By DANIEL DE LEON

Not the least significant of the positions that the Socialist Labor Party stormed last election day, enabling it to deploy its ranks all along the logical line of battle in the class struggle of America, is that that unqualifiedly frowns down upon IDOLATRY.

If any one thing more than any other is the distinguishing mark of the Socialist, that thing is veneration for FACTS. "Sentiment," "partialities," "leanings" always have a tendency to rear up against fact. To yield an inch to them is to slide down the slope, where, instead of adapting theories to facts, facts are stretched or squeezed so as to adapt them to theories; at the lowest bottom of the slope, idolatry, superstition, is rampant.

The idolater is a weak being, as needs must be he who stands not upon facts. He is like a feather in the wind, blown hither or thither. In his weakness, he becomes a dupe. Idolatry is that characteristic that always renders the victim of the weakness the toy of designing men. Idolatry is the weapon of the scoundrel wherewith to rule the silly. The idol, held before the idolater, renders him impotent.

Such an idol in this country is the word "Unionism"; and the idolatry, connected with the term, lies shattered behind the triumphant hosts of the Socialist Labor Party since last November 7.

"Unions," "Unionism,"—these are not words or things to be taken as current coin; least of all are they words to bow down and worship. Noble as the "Union" is, when it IS a Union, so hideous and ignoble is the thing when it is a masked counterfeit. A "Union," composed of workingmen, moving upon class-lines is an element of civilization. An organization, however, that is an appendage of the capitalist social machinery, such a thing is a disgrace to the workers, it is so much rubbish in the path of civilization, and whether it calls itself a "Union" or not, it is a thing to be condemned, shattered and swept away.

Time was, when still too tender of heart, which is the same as saying, too inexperienced in mind, the Socialist Labor Party was regularly made the victim of the "Union Idolatry." It had not yet learned that behind the word there was, as likely as not, to lurk the very foe that Socialism was in the field to overthrow. It has learned better since. A bitter experience taught it wisdom. It discovered that its prestige was sought, and, when gained, utilized by a class of men who, corrupt through ignorance, and malevolent through vanity, were unable to rise above personal and usually very petty purposes. That day has passed. Across a veritable hailstorm of "unionistic" denunciation, the Party beat its way to that place that it now holds.

No sane man will hold that any or every twenty dollar gold piece put into his hand is genuine; the coin is struck against a hard substance; if the ring is false, it is rejected. So with the Union.

With the idol of the word "Unionism" shattered behind the Party, there lie a number of other idol-fragments connected with the same. The Party now stands erect upon its feet, untterrified by any ghosts or ghost stories, serene before any "names" that may be hurled at it. Capitalism cannot make the Party bow superstitiously before Idols.

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

Uploaded May 2005