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EDITORIAL

LASHING THE SEA.

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This year's vote, in every state in which the Social Democracy had a ticket, presents some feature that is well worth studying. Together, these features furnish the ground-work for a not invaluable treatise on "Tactics."

It is undeniable that a good deal of what may be called "revolutionary temper" is afloat in the country. This revolutionary temper need not be all that is claimed for it in certain quarters. In many respects, when closely inspected, it partakes rather of reaction: It is a memory of the Revolution of last century, and, consequently, is strongly flavored with the aspirations of middle class production. Nevertheless, it is an element of discontent. However wrongly premised discontent may be, it has great merits over stolid, bovine content. It is more accessible, more sympathetic.

Based upon this fact, the tactics of the Socialist Labor Party have been often and severely condemned; and the vote of the Party, never yet large enough to fill the eye, has been quoted as proof of the contention. These critics have steadily contended that proper tactics consisted in gathering in the elements of discontent, the elements affected with the revolutionary temper, elements that they lumped together under the designation of "Reform Forces." The tactics pursued in this direction resolved themselves in this: the finding of the greatest common denominator, so to speak, among the various elements to be united. The best sample of this pudding is furnished by the "reform" vote of the State of Wisconsin during the last twelve years, closing with the Social Democratic vote of this year.

Wisconsin is a State where, for several weighty reasons, the revolutionary waters have been in perpetual agitation. There, the endeavor of "coming together" by means of a common denominator has been pursued more persistently than elsewhere. After more than one endeavor, the efforts in that direction crystallized in the "Union Labor Party"; and in the presidential year of 1888 there were polled in the State 8,552 votes for Streetor, the presidential candidate of the party. Twelve years of "coming together" have since gone by; during this period, one breath of

reform after another swept over the State; Populism, that “Socialistic” movement, heralded as such in Wisconsin particularly, raised the vote of the “gathered revolutionary elements” as high as 25,604 in '94; and finally, in this year of grace 1900, the revolutionary elements—gathered together under the headship of Debs, upon principles “broader,” “more American,” “saner” than the principles of the Socialist Labor Party—, muster up what figure?—7,094! more than 18,000 less than was reached in '94, and 1,500 below even the figures of '88!

These figures demonstrated the soundness of the S.L.P. logic. The tactics of seeking to bring together large elements upon a “common denominator” platform resolve themselves, in practice, to establishing an ever weaker bond between the elements that are to be welded into one. A chain is no stronger than its weakest link. The tactics of the S.L.P. proceed from the principle that the bond that must unite large masses in a great cause must be a bond of cardinal principle: in this instance, the principle of the irrepressible class struggle in Society between the Capitalist Class and the Working Class. Sure enough, such a principle cannot be grasped readily and extensively. But union can come only in the measure that the principle is grasped.

The tactics of the S.L.P. imply slow but sure growth through education, with unquestioned triumph in the fullness of time. The tactics of its critics are but a lashing of the sea.

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