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CORRESPONDENCE

A CARD AND A CHALLENGE FROM DANIEL DE LEON.

TO the DAILY PEOPLE—The *New Yorker Volkszeitung* of Thursday, the 21st instant, contains an editorial article in which the following passage appears:

“It was the year 1887. In Clarendon Hall a meeting was being held of the Publishing Association, that published the *Leader*, the then Socialist daily of New York. The paper found itself financially embarrassed, and the question was how to raise funds. In the midst of the discussion a man rose and declared that he could get from Jimmy O’Brien, ex-Sheriff of New York, and Tammany-Republican-Independent professional politician as high as \$8,000 without entailing any obligation. ‘I earnestly advise that this money be taken,’ said he, ‘Non olet! Money stinks not.’

“The meeting jumped up in highest excitement, and, full of indignation, it howled and hissed down the man, who had submitted this proposition. White as the wash on the wall he sank down into his seat.

“That man was ‘Professor’ Daniel De Leon!”

This story is a robust falsehood, known to be such by its publishers. To people in the Labor Movement a refutation of this charge is superfluous. They know the established reputation of the *Volkszeitung* for reckless mendacity. During the last year and a half, in particular, they have caught that paper, red-handed in calumny after calumny, and in the deliberate publication of preposterously false statements on matters of importance. To such people, the appearance of any important statement in that paper, particularly against an officer of the Socialist Labor Party, is, at least, presumptive evidence of its falsity, and the matter is justly cast aside as an impotent ebullition of the white-heat rage into which the cowering to which the Party has subjected the *Volkszeitung* has thrown that obscene sheet.

But comparatively few people are as yet in active touch with the Labor Movement. A decent regard for the public induces me to meet this accusation now, and remove all occasion for its further circulation in good faith, by placing the facts on record, categorically, and once for all.

I was present at the *Leader* meeting where Jimmy O'Brien's name was mentioned. I mentioned it. I had heard rumors of his having offered to loan money to the paper. I rose—not to make a motion or submit a proposition, nor did I make or submit any—I rose for information. I asked whether it was true that Jimmy O'Brien had offered moneys. It is not true that an uproar followed; least of all that I was howled or hissed down. Amidst perfect order, the chair answered my question in the affirmative, and I sat down in perfect peace.

But the meeting did not continue in perfect quiet. My question, put, as will more fully appear, in perfect innocence, brought on an animated discussion. When now looked back upon, that discussion assumes peculiar interest. The meeting divided into two. One part, overwhelmingly the larger, favored the acceptance of the money from O'Brien; the other part, very much the smaller, was against acceptance. Of what material were the two sides composed?

Those against the acceptance were the Archibalds and McKims, all of them Tammany heelers, and as such anxious to kill the paper, and, above all, to prevent giving prestige to O'Brien, who was anti-Tammany.

And who were for acceptance? Why, the *Volkszeitung* element, in whose building the paper was published, and who controlled it absolutely. Their spokesman on that occasion was none less than their own Schewitch,—before then and after then, a *Volkszeitung* Editor. Schewitch made an impassioned address for acceptance of the money; he ridiculed and violently attacked what he called the “spasm of purity” that had “suddenly seized upon the Archibalds”; he exposed their hostility to the paper, and he carried the day. His own *Volkszeitung* crowd was so overwhelmingly in the majority that he needed no aid from an element of which I then was one, that scented and despised the Archibald politician element, but altho' it did not train with the *Volkszeitung* set, felt sympathetic toward it. As it was, Schewitch got many a vote that was not of his own set. I can not now say for certain whether I voted or not. If I did, I supported Schewitch, whom I took for an honorable man, and whose side I judged by him.

The motion to accept the money having prevailed, a member of the body was to be chosen, and was so chosen, on the spot, to see O'Brien. And who was that member? Why, I myself; chosen without dissent by a vote in which the *Volkszeitung* element was dominant!—That much for the ghost story of my having been howled down and made to sink with blanched cheeks into my seat by an indignant meeting.

I had taken no part in the discussion. I had followed it with all the curiosity of a

man, who was barely eight months in the Labor Movement, and felt not a little bewildered; behind whom a storm was raging against himself for “disgracing himself by his activity in the Labor Movement”; and before whom, to his unspeakable surprise, scenes were constantly enacting that gave rude shocks to many an illusion concerning the singleness of purpose of whomsoever was found in the camp of Labor. That scene took place in the early part of the summer of 1887,—fourteen years ago. I was not then a Socialist; claimed to be none; was no member of what then called itself the “Socialist Labor Party,” which I did not join until fully three years later; and, as to the Social Question, especially the fact and principle of the Class Struggle and all that thereby hangs, I knew next to nothing. I only vaguely discerned the granite ribs of Socialism, and how uninformed I then was may be judged from the fact that I looked upon the *Volkszeitung* element as pillars of sound theoretic, and pure, sturdy tactical Socialism. My election to see O’Brien evidently was dictated by the sense that I was of neither faction, and could be trusted by both as one who would not steal. I accepted the mission, imagining it to come from a stalwart, incorruptible element, the *Volkszeitung* element. I saw O’Brien the next day, and once more a day or two later. I had never seen the man before, could, accordingly, have made no offers in his name. His conduct, his appearance and his language warned me to drop my embassy quick, and I did so on the spot. I have been informed that O’Brien then established direct negotiations with the *Volkszeitung*, and gave them moneys. I do not know the fact of my own knowledge. To judge by what I have subsequently learned of the corrupt practices of the *Volkszeitung*, down to its recent wallowing in the smut of Carnegie-Hearst-Coler donations, my information is probably correct.

That is what happened. It disposes in toto of the *Volkszeitung* yarn. The tale here unfolded is known to not a few in this city. For brazen falsification and for worm-like twisting of the truth this latest achievement of the *Volkszeitung* beats all. But I shall go further, and also prove it to be a clumsy, boomerang act of recklessness. I now challenge the *New Yorker Volkszeitung* to publish, from their own files, their own report of that *Leader* meeting of 1887 in parallel columns with the version that they now give. Meager tho’ that report may be, it will surely be ample to impale the *Volkszeitung*, and for all time hold it up to public contempt as a hypocrite, besides a headless, reckless libeler and liar.

The *Volkszeitung* is running amuck; the little head it ever had is now wholly lost, as revealed by this its latest feat. And no wonder:

The business so long plied by its set, of trafficking on the Labor Movement, has been wrecked by the shot and shell of the Socialist Labor Party. Exposed as rank ignoramuses on Socialism, they were then convicted of treason to the Working Class. By documentary evidence they were proven guilty of corruption: guilty of taking advertisements from capitalist politicians; guilty of taking bribes from the Organized Scabbery to hush up the infamies perpetrated by these upon the rank and file in the Union; guilty of taking bribes from another set of the Organized Scabbery to whoop up hopeless strikes, by which the rank and file was bled, while the Organized Scabbery lived in clover; guilty of gathering money for men on strike, holding the money back for their own use, and inserting the amount in their sworn-to inventories in order to pad their assets; guilty of ignoring, during all these long weeks, by as much as a single line of editorial warning, the infamy of its own crowd in begging and accepting donations from the Carnegie capitalist fleecers of Labor and their lackeys, the politicians, etc., etc.

Convicted beyond redemption, the pack was whipped out of the Socialist Labor Party. The mask being torn from their faces, they have since been engaged in the task of trying to drag down into their own morass the honorable body of men that had cast them off as a leprosy on the Movement; their inevitable failure on that line has bereft them of all sense; and thus the spectacle is seen to-day of a lot of European adventurers—one of whom is a runaway embezzler from Berlin, and others of whom together with their hangers-on, have been graphically characterized by the *Staats-Zeitung*, which knows its chickens, as “Ballon-Muetzen”—drop all pretence of having a principle, or arguments to defend it with; bestow all their time to ransacking personal records; feel stung with rage and mortification at finding the Party officers beyond reach of their polluted arrows; and bereft of all sense, finally, in their fury, impale themselves to public view, as they have done in this instance—and where I can well afford to leave them quivering.

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New York, March 22.

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