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EDITORIAL

THE TRAUTMANN CASE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

ELSEWHERE in this issue will be found the [signed statement](#) of {William} Ernest Trautmann to the Working Class of America. From the statement—confirmatory evidence of which will later be furnished—the following facts stand out clear:



WILLIAM E. TRAUTMANN

Trautmann was the Editor of the *Brauer-Zeitung*, the organ of the United Brewery Workingmen, an organization that endorsed the so-called Socialist party; he took part in arranging for a call to organize the Working Class of the land into a Union that he considered superior to the Civic-Federationized American Federation of Labor of Gompers; for doing so the Executive Board of his organization—at least one of whom, Priesterbach, is a member of a St. Louis Democratic Club—demanded his resignation; he refused, and the question was sent to a referendum vote, both sides publishing their statements; by a majority of over 1,000 votes the rank and file sustained Trautmann; but the Executive Board—the accusers in the case—resolved themselves into a “Board of Review,” and with the Democratic politician Priesterbach, for one, among them, counted out enough votes favorable to Trautmann, and thus gave themselves a majority, and turned Trautmann out of his office.

Thick as blackbirds in spring do the points rise in connection with—we must admit it—this welcome incident in the volcanic eruptions and convulsions that are just now being experienced in the American Labor Movement. We shall here single out the one that strikes us as most typical and luminous.

It can have escaped no one that the terms “individual opinion,” “individual action” have latterly figured quite conspicuously in certain quarters. They are used as a justification, as terms denoting independent individual rights. Victor L. Berger, for instance, the Wisconsin Social Democratic chieftain, used them to justify his conduct in the recent matter of the Milwaukee elections where he advocated the voting for a capitalist candidate. He claimed that it was his “individual opinion” and “individual action” which concerned not his organization, the Social Democratic party. Let us test the principle.

Priesterbach is a member of the Executive Board of the Brewers’ Union, a body that endorsed the so-called Socialist, alias Social Democratic party. Priesterbach joined a capitalist political club, a Democratic club of St. Louis. Was this an act of treason or disloyalty to his Union, which endorsed another party? We suppose not. We suppose that Priesterbach and his fellow members on the Executive Board justify the act on the ground that it was his “individual opinion,” his “individual action,” to which he has a sovereign right. And, accordingly, he remains an undisturbed member of a capitalist political club and of the said Brewers’ Executive Board.

Trautmann, the Editor of a paper whose organization is affiliated with American Federation of Labor, joins a body of men in preparing for the organization of another national Union. According to the principle of “individual opinion” and “individual action,” the unsophisticated would think that Trautmann’s “individual opinion” and “individual action” would be at least as sacred as Priesterbach’s.—Not at all! Priesterbach may exercise his “individual opinion” against his Union’s; although he is a member of the Executive Board, he may join a Democratic capitalist club, but Trautmann has no right to any “individual opinion”! He must be cashiered.

One more illustration will make the point still clearer:

Berger, a member of the National Executive Committee of the so-called Socialist party, a party that, claiming to be Socialist, must be at war with all political parties and candidates of capitalism, came out in his two papers, *Wahrheit* and *Social Democratic Herald*, with articles that promoted the election of a Democratic candidate. Trautmann brought the matter up in the National Executive

Committee of the said Socialist party and demanded an investigation. Berger's defense was that he simply acted upon his "individual opinion," that he had a right to his "individual action" without thereby binding his party or being responsible to it therefor. But this identical Berger shouts with delight at the Executive Board of the Brewers' for denying Trautmann the right to his "individual opinion" and "individual action."

Are these people gone crazy? Not at all! Is it that they have been seized with a sudden dementia for injustice, and will deny to others rights and privileges that they claim for themselves? Not at all! "Berger" and "Priesterbach," on the one side, "Trautmann," on the other, are not the points at issue. The point at issue is the PRINCIPLE that each set represents; and the side with which, in each of the instances quoted above, victory remains SIMPLY PROCLAIMS BY ITS CONDUCT WHAT THE DOMINANT PRINCIPLE IS WITH IT.

What Berger did was not to deny to Trautmann rights that he claimed for himself: what he did was to pronounce himself and his party in favor of the PRINCIPLE upon which he acted—to wit: log-rolling with capitalist politicians.

So likewise with the Executive Board of the Brewers. When it deposed Trautmann and let Priesterbach in peace, what it did was not to deny to Trautmann rights that it recognized in Priesterbach: what it did was to pronounce itself in favor of the PRINCIPLE upon which Priesterbach acted and which Trautmann's conduct no doubt flew in the face of—to wit: log-rolling with capitalism.

It is always well to break through the outward crust of personalities, and come down to the rock-bed of cause. Thus alone can rumpuses prove fruitful, and right PRINCIPLE prevail—as prevail it must.

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REPRINT

THE TRAUTMANN CASE ***HOW THEY ARE “SMASHING” SOCIALISM AND*** ***INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM***

Capitalist Politicians in the Union’s Executive Board Act as “Judge, Jury and Executioner,” and Ride Rough-shod Over the Referendum Fiat of the Rank and File, Obedient to the Civic Federationized Gompers Crew.

Cincinnati, April 26.—When on April 17th the Associated Press dispatches carried forward the statement, as contained in the Cincinnati Enquirer of that date with the following big headlines:—SOCIALISM IS BEING STAMPED OUT BY THE LEADERS OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR. INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM WILL BE COMPLETELY ERADICATED. DEPOSITION OF EDITOR TRAUTMANN WILL BE FOLLOWED BY SIMILAR ACTION IN OTHER CASES,—the press did not hesitate at the same time to publish the statements of the General Executive Board of the United Brewery Workers, but failed, after signed and sworn to statements were presented them for rebuttal, to inform the world of labor that the stamping out act was only accomplished by an atrocious crime, as perhaps seldom witnessed in the annals of the labor movement of America, so filled with chapters of appalling mischiefs and outrages.

In behalf of the General Executive Board of the United Brewery Workers, Mr. Priesterbach gives a signed statement, to wit:

“RECEIVED AND ULTIMATUM.

“We deposed Trautmann because we do not propose to let him or those who think with him on the subject of Industrial Unionism wreck on the rocks of Socialism our international organization which it has taken us many years to build up and perfect.

“We deposed him in our meeting of January last, but we appealed to a referendum vote of the general membership, which endorsed our stand, and when the result of the vote was delivered Saturday, Trautmann was told to step down and out.”

The Executive Board of the United Brewery Workers International Union admit that we have received an ultimatum from the officials of the American Federation of Labor that “Trautmann should either resign is position as Secretary of the National Industrial Union, or else be deposed as Editor of the Brauer Zeitung, and if this mandate was not obeyed the

Brewery Workers' International Union would be expelled from the American Federation of Labor."

This gives the kernel in the nutshell. Not only borne out be the strongest evidence, in spite of the denial of the International Executive Board next day, but also in startling derision of the expressed will of the membership of the United Brewery Workers, who, by 1261 votes majority on a referendum, instituted purely on a question of principles, sustained the editor, it has been demonstrated that the issue involved was that of "smashing Socialism in the union movement of this country."

Let the Socialists know that neither Mr. Kemper, one of the international secretaries of the U.B.W., nor Mr. Priesterbach, both of whom are the instruments of the Gompers machine in the Brewery Workers' organization, is connected with either Socialist party, or known to be non-partisan Socialists. PRIESTERBACH IS A BRILLIANT LIGHT IN THE JEFFERSON DEMOCRATIC PARTY CLUB OF ST. LOUIS, TOGETHER WITH SEVERAL BREWERY PROPRIETORS OF THAT CITY.

Nor is one of the International Executive Board members of the United Brewery Workers, who were responsible for Trautmann's deposition, with two exceptions, members of any one of the Socialist political or economic parties. These exceptions are members from Milwaukee, Wis., who acted apparently under certain instructions, for which statement bears evidence the fact that before the total vote was computed the Social Democratic Herald knew already and heralded it out, that the editor of the Brauer Zeitung, a "traitorous man," had been deposed.

How could an organization, known to be composed of a large number of Socialists reach such a conclusion, or how could a General Executive Board, supposed to bow to the mandates of the rank and file, become such pliant instruments in the hands of those who would "smash Socialism at all hazards?"

When the public press stated a few days after the last Executive Council meeting of the A.F. of L. that everything in the jurisdiction quarrels of the United Brewery Workers with other unions had been satisfactorily adjusted, and the charter of the United Brewery Workers would not be revoked as decreed by the San Francisco convention of the American Federation of Labor, the price for this adjustment of troubles was not made known. It was to be paid, perhaps dear enough to the Brewery Workers, by a repudiation of their principles. Trautmann's individual connection with the industrial union movement caused the Brewery Workers' Executive Board to call at once a meeting together in January. The ultimatum issued to Trautmann was either to resign from the Industrial Union Movement or give up the job as officer of the United Brewery organization, elected by referendum vote on exactly the same principles as embodied now in the well-known manifesto. Trautmann chose to deny the right of the Executive Board to depose him on such flimsy grounds, and appealed against the plaintiffs in the case to a general vote of the membership. The vote was taken. Ballots were to be counted at headquarters by the same Executive Board members who were the plaintiffs. A standing rule of the organization provides that every

member must cast his own ballot. Since plaintiffs cannot act as judges, Trautmann entered protest and demanded witnesses on the canvassing committee, which was at first denied, later on allowed. The two witnesses, impartial men, are well-known Socialists, and members of the United Brewery Workers' Union. They were the real canvassers from all viewpoints of even capitalist law and custom. However, their counting result was not recognized and in order to get a full statement before the interested public and affidavit had to be sworn to that the canvassers selected as impartial, were the ones whose word and statement must be taken as true, since they are disinterested in the matter. They found that of 23,271 votes cast 9,157 votes were given in favor of the Executive Board in discharging Trautmann, the Editor, and 10,481 votes were cast sustaining the editor in his attitude towards the industrial union movement, giving him a majority of 1,261 votes. But 3,186 votes were either illegally cast and under points of the constitution not to be recognized, or fraudulently "yes" votes, favoring the International Executive Board, substituted to change the result of the referendum in such unions foremostly to which the International Executive Board members belong.

In several unions one man had cast all votes unanimously against Trautmann and for the Executive Board, in others where the rank and file had voted in favor of sustaining the editor, fraudulent votes written by one or two individuals were substituted to change the result, and in one case an International Executive Board member, Ad. Kummer, of Cincinnati, admitted that he had written twelve notes {sic} or more for the sustaining of the Executive Board, and could not deny it either, when seriously confronted.

The largest union of Brewery Workers, L.U. No. 9, of Milwaukee, had cast a large majority in favor of sustaining the editor but that vote was thrown out by the executive board members, for legitimate reasons, yet on same reasons they refused to throw out the vote of other unions equally in default, but as had cast the votes against Trautmann. The winding up of the statement of the canvassers of the deposed editor shows more conclusively that his deposition for his connection with the Industrial Union Movement was in obedience to the mandates of the A.F. of L. machine.

These were to be carried even if more outrages had to be resorted to. Both witness say:—"We will not refrain from making mention of some incidents that will throw still more light on the outrageous partiality displayed by the Executive members.{"} When during the counting it was announced that a union had cast all votes "yes," thus against Trautmann's stand, one of the Executive members would make remarks such as, "Well, these men have sense," which remarks were followed by sneering laughter from the others. In such a serious matter as the referendum vote in Trautmann's case to make such silly remarks and show scorn of the will of the membership so brazenly and openly is simply condemnable, and the members have a right to learn these things.

Striking as it is, that foremostly in such unions in which members of the Executive Board hold membership, such flagrant, vicious and abject violation of the constitutional laws of our International Unions are carried on, this only serves as an object lesson that the

plaintiffs of Trautmann wanted to change the judgment in the case, which rests in the referendum of the membership, in such a manner and wanted to make it subject to their intents, with all foul means, that we must call attention to this incident unique in the records of the labor movement.

This document, by being released to the membership of the International Union of United Brewery Workers, contains the manly expression of two members who went through three long lasting strikes and lockouts, and who wanted to play fair and impartial in this case, and intend to do so hereafter.

This, in our judgment, will, so we hope, arouse the membership so that they may make such preparations that an end be forever put to such fraudulent procedures in the International Union of United Brewery Workers, lest the referendum, instead of being a measure of protection, might become a farce and an instrument to prop up a padroni system, which may hold its cruel whip over the heads which dare to revolt at this injustice, and are loath to submitting to the will of machines and bosses in an organization.

When the forcible ejection was consummated, on Saturday, April 15th, the supposed-to-be “smashers of Socialism and Industrial Unionism,” could not proceed further in the humiliation of a man who had to fight them because they were elected on the supposition of being ardent Socialists, while in reality supporters of old parties, than to search the private papers and belongings, forcibly, as one could not stand up against twelve of them, before he was allowed to leave. It was known to them and so to Gompers that Trautmann had collected evidence of corruption in most of the International Unions connected with the A.F. of L., and to get these valuable papers they first subjected the defenseless to this humiliation as described, and then offered any price to get these clippings, as they called them, and so when unsuccessful to get them by the offer of bribe, money not belonging to them, they came out with threats. But in anticipation of what was planned these important documents had been stored away in the hands of an attorney, and the smashing act of Socialism was frustrated on those lines at least.

If Mr. Gompers and his followers, desperate as they have become, and the capitalist press now supporting them vigorously, find any comfort in the fact that such fraudulent, desperate and outrageous procedures are necessary in the smashing process, we will not begrudge them this delight, but neither will Socialism nor the sound principles of Industrial Unionism, with all germs or corruption eradicated, which by its tolerance has made of the officials in the American Federation of Labor a handmaid of capitalism, as most of them are, able to stem the tide of progress. They see the handwriting on the wall foreshadowing the events impending, when the workers, looking for truth and longing for solidarity upon the economic battlefield, will throw overboard such misleaders and disrupters, and form and present, line up and complete a solid phalanx in their war of defense against the encroachments of the master class, and the battle of attack against the strongholds of the capitalist system of society.

Once more has the A.F. of L. and its capitalistic supporters found pliant tools to

overthrow, repudiate, to ignore and to deride the will of the rank and file—be it the last time.

WM. E. TRAUTMANN.

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

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slpns@slp.org