

ARTICLE

## FLASHLIGHTS OF THE I.W.W. CONVENTION, 1906.

III.

P.R. McDONALD.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**M**CDONALD of British Columbia was, together with McMullen, the twin reactionary delegate of the four who constituted the miners' delegation. Tho' twin in purposes, as far as a petrified reactionist can have a purpose, and twin in policy, as far as the rudderless mind of a reactionist can have a policy, McDonald and McMullen were not "as like two peas." McMullen can not be anywhere nine minutes without everybody knowing he is there, and not only knowing of his existence but knowing a good chunk of his domestic affairs, including his being the happy possessor of a grandchild, "altho' none of you would think me so old"; McDonald is bovine and taciturn. McMullen has an old "labor record," upon the strength of which he has since been traveling. During a Northwestern strike, he, being then a locomotive engineer, promptly obeyed orders and left his engine standing. The act was praiseworthy, was, however, in process of time turned by McMullen into a misfortune, at any rate a nuisance to the Labor Movement. He turned it into a reason for ceasing to deserve respect; he turned it into an "investment" for his private purposes. I know many another instance of that sort, among them one of an individual with about \$150 of savings who, at a critical moment to a Union, poured the whole amount into the Union's treasury—and has ever after lived in clover upon the Labor Movement on the strength of that "record." These isolated acts of abnegation are, in fact, "investments," investments that, in their way, may vie with any that are made in Wall Street. They partake of the nature of life annuities. McMullen is such a life-annuitant, on the Labor Movement:

McDonald has no “record,” he must trust to luck to carry him on. It was luck, as I shall presently show, that wafted him as a delegate into the convention. McMullen, as may be judged from what precedes, is “clever”; McDonald is dull. Yet let none imagine McDonald is dull through and through. The man is not without the low cunning of his type. He tried it on me the very first day of the convention, and thereby introduced himself.

Some time during the forenoon hours that followed the first clash between the Reactionists and the Revolutionists, and while the Committee on Credentials was at work, McDonald approached me in the area at headquarters, he gave me his name, etc., and drew me into conversation. He wanted a “confidential talk.” No lambkin, loaded with wool, could be as placidly confiding towards the clipper as he affected to be towards me. No hook ever was baited with a livelier “fiddler” than McDonald as he drew me towards a corner. We sat down on a box, cosily together—two huckleberries on a bush, and the “confidential talk” began. He did the talking; with the oil of confidence shining over his face, he declared: It was a sad thing to see workingmen fall out; Labor could do anything if it pulled together, but these perpetual rumpions spoiled it all; there we were in the convention, quarreling from the very start; why could we not be brothers;—and much more to the same purpose. He drew closer, and became more intimate: What is it all about? ’Tis the same old thing; (still more confidentially) all a fight for jobs; once a man has a job he wants to keep it forever; “I say it is wrong; officers should not want to be officers always; what say you? I say ’tis wrong; these men should stop quarreling and be brothers.” He finally reached a point where, without danger of putting an end to the fun I was having, I could not avoid saying something in turn. As he put the question to me point blank: “Don’t you think there is corruption here?” I answered sententiously: “I waste no time upon corruption. Corruption is a result of false principles. The important thing is the principle at bottom of the two factions.” He had no use for that sort of language, and obviously he was becoming impatient to get out of me what he came after. “Are there two factions?” queried he. “Yes, a Revolutionary and clean, a Reactionary and corrupt.” His eyes snapped. No daughter ever sought confident information as she presses to her mother’s bosom as did McDonald as he pressed against me now. He was now on the point of ascertaining what he came, or

was sent to find out from me. “I am a stranger among these men—all are strangers to me (sic.)—I don’t know one of them (sic.)—who are the corrupt ones?” With unctiousness that sought to match his own I answered: “McDonald, there are things which, if a man needs to be told, the information is wasted.” That snapped the line. With the looks of a man who failed to land his fish, McDonald rose and left. He had nothing to report back.

What may be called the “Sims Case” further illustrates the caliber of the man. Sims was not wanted in the convention by the Sherman plotters. He was a contesting delegate. The Sherman plotters raised the point against him that he was not in good standing, and they sought to prove the charge with his card, from which stamps for the immediately preceding seven months were absent. On this ground he was to be kept out. There could be no doubt that Sims was in good standing. He explained that he was frequently on the road as organizer for the I.W.W., and that the secretary of his local did not happen to have the stamps when he was around; he backed up his statements with the testimony of a member in good standing in his local (Milwaukee) who happened to be present, and also with a telegram from that secretary. Morally Sims was entitled to admission. Nevertheless, a man who comes to a contest should be careful to come prepared; Sims should have had an affidavit from his local secretary; moreover, I did not care to establish the precedent of “telegrams” officiating as “stamps”; so, I voted No on the seating of Sims, and he would have been excluded but for the vote of McDonald. McDonald’s vote seated him although McDonald spoke against, and his side wished Sims to be excluded. How McDonald came to vote as he did is typical of the man. My name happened to be the eighth on the roll-call, the names of the miners’ delegates came considerably after. I had voted No. As the caller of the roll was approaching the miners’ delegation, Mahoney, who noticed that McDonald was engaged in a private conversation, pulled him by the sleeve saying: “Get ready to vote; be sure to vote No.” McDonald angrily pulled away saying: “Indeed, I will not; that De Leon has voted No; I’m going to vote Yes”—and YES it was a few seconds later; he voted Yes in italics, Yes with a slam bang, and Sims was seated.

But the huge joke, or calcium light on McDonald, did not end there. The incident just related was not long in reaching me. When I heard it, I took up my

pencil and note book and said to my informant, putting down the figures: "Good! I now have 103 votes in this convention. Whenever I shall want a motion to prevail, or a motion to be lost, all I shall have to do will be to vote the other way. I lose my 5 votes, I gain McDonald's 108—net gain 103 votes!" It seems my words were carried back to McDonald; they disconcerted him. How wholly they threw the man off his hinges soon appeared. An hour or so later, his chum Mahoney being in the chair, and having made one of his absurd and wrong-headed rulings in favor of McCabe, an appeal was taken. On the motion, Shall the chair be sustained? I voted, of course, No. When McDonald's name was called he was utterly at sea. He had heard that I had just said I would vote so as to get 103 votes from him; he thought my negative vote was a trick to make him vote Yes; on the other hand, to vote No and thus to cast his vote on my side went against his grain. He hesitated, and finally decided that of the two evils, to vote on my side was not as bad as to "cross my trick"—and he voted No!! In the case of Sims, it was McDonald's vote that seated Sims; in the second instance, his vote helped to drown Mahoney's ruling under an overwhelming number of No's. I am informed that that same day Mahoney and McMullen pulled McDonald aside and asked him whether he had gone stark crazy.

In a future "Flashlight" on "The 'S.L.P.' and Other Howls" I shall have occasion to return to McDonald. Enough has been said here to photograph the man. The picture suggests the question, Does the circumstance that the miners' delegation was equally divided between two intelligent and honorable men, Albert Ryan and Vincent St. John, and between two others of opposite stamp, McDonald and McMullen, indicate and serve as a gauge of the relative numerical strength of the two elements among the membership of the Western Federation of Miners? I think not. McDonald's election was a case of "cart-head luck." My proof of this fact may serve as a warning that the time for "fooling" is at end in the Labor Movement. The delegation was elected at this year's convention of the miners. McDonald's nomination was taken as a joke. Such is the poor estimation the man is held in by the membership of his own district, that, from all the British Columbia delegates he received only 2 votes—one of these 2 being HIS OWN; and such was the hugeness of the joke McDonald's nomination was taken to be that Albert Ryan gave his votes to him, "for fun," nobody expected he would be elected—and all this notwithstanding,

McDonald was elected only by the skin of his teeth; by only  $\frac{1}{2}$  a vote majority. It is not likely that Ryan will indulge in any more such “funs.”

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