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EDITORIAL

THAT "MISTAKE."

By DANIEL DE LEON

LOUIS E. MILLER, the talented editor of the Yiddish *Warheit* of this city, editorializes on the 8th of this month extensively upon what to him seems a mistake, if not worse, committed by the national convention of the Socialist Labor Party in placing M.R. Preston at the head of its Presidential ticket. The following is the principal passage in the argument:

We desire to be understood.

It is quite possible, and we readily admit it, that Martin Preston, the Presidential candidate of the S.L.P., who was convicted for murder and sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment, is innocent. That he is one of the universally recognized victims of the class struggle who are justly the martyrs of progress is equally possible.

We admit all that as being very probable.

And here we reach the main problems:

May a Party of Socialism nominate a person of that kind?

What is the object of a political campaign, and what must be the object of a party like the S.L.P. in such a campaign?

Presumably its main object must be to carry on Socialist propaganda, and to increase the number of Socialists in the country, as well as the membership of the Party.

How can these things be accomplished? Simply by attacking the existing system, its phenomena and consequent results.

In order to successfully attack the capitalist system, and to equally successfully propagate Socialism, the candidates must be such that if their personalities can not assist in the battle, they should, at least, be no hindrance to the same.

It is the Alpha and Beta of propaganda everywhere, of agitation, argumentation and logic generally, not to multiply, but rather to simplify, the issues in a campaign of ideas and a movement of ideas.

To be brief, Socialists have to tackle a difficult proposition in making the principles of Socialism comprehensible to the masses, leaving out the question of guilt or innocence of a man, who is guilty before the eyes of the large masses of people, because a jury of 12 citizens so decreed.

We will not mention the fact that Preston is below the legal age and therefore

is ineligible for office. A party and a movement should not be so ridiculous as to nominate a candidate who, even if elected, could not fill his office, because he has not reached the Constitutional age limit.

In short, the S.L.P., instead of using the opportunity to attack CAPITALISM, will, in this campaign, BE OBLIGED TO DEFEND ITS OWN CANDIDATE.

This is neither the aim nor the mission of a campaign, and the Party should not have permitted it.

And the worst of it is that by their nominating Preston, not only the party that nominated him is put to ridicule, but the enemy will use this to ridicule and to discredit Socialism as a whole.

The Convention had the right to adopt resolutions condemning the imprisonment of Preston, demanding his liberation and expressing sympathy in every other way. To nominate him as a candidate, and thus convert the Socialist battle against capital into a defense campaign for a convicted Socialist, that probably might be done under certain circumstances in certain countries, but not under American circumstances in America.

This is an instance that eminently illustrates the radical differences of opinion that may arise between men, at one on general principles, with regard to the practical application of the very principles which they hold in common.

With not one of the general principles set forth in the *Warheit* is the *Daily People* at variance.

With *Warheit*, *The People* holds that the main object of a political party of Socialism must be to carry on Socialist propaganda.

With *Warheit*, *The People* holds that Socialist propaganda must consist in attacking the existing system and exposing its phenomena.

With *Warheit*, *The People* holds that the candidates of a political party of Socialism should be men whose personality rather assists, and never hinders, the propaganda.

Finally, with *Warheit*, *The People* holds that a political party of Socialism has a difficult enough proposition to tackle in making the principles of Socialism comprehensible to the masses; consequently, that it should strive to simplify the issues in a campaign, avoid their multiplication, eschew ridiculousness, and manoeuvre to be on the aggressive and not place itself on the defensive.

Did the S.L.P. sin against any one of these tenets?

Let us take up, one by one, the tenets laid down by *Warheit* as canons for Socialist propaganda in a political campaign.

First of all, **the propaganda should concentrate upon exposing the phenomena of the existing system.**

There is one phenomenon of the existing system that embodies in itself at once Socialist economics, Socialist sociology, and Socialist practice; and that, moreover, is not, this year, a phenomenon that requires the raking up of history to exemplify. It is a palpitating phenomenon. It palpitates so strongly that it takes precedence of all others. That phenomenon of the present day system of capitalism is a Court-made law to the effect that picket-duty is a crime, and its enforcement by the imprisonment of a picketman in a State penitentiary.

Socialism consists of both aims and means. Socialist society, the goal of Socialist propaganda, is not a social system whose government consists of Socialist Legislators and Executives, instead of the present government of Republican and Democratic politicians. Socialist society is a social system whose central directing authority consists of representatives of all the useful occupations of the land. As its oft-given name—the Republic of Labor—indicates, Socialist society is a structure of organized Labor—productive Labor, distributive Labor, serviceable Labor; in other words, useful manual and intellectual effort.

Goals determine means. The New Yorker who would go to Europe will not take a row-boat, such as would suffice to convey him across the Hudson River to Hoboken. He would take a sea-worthy ship, adequate to breast the storms of the ocean. The goal of Socialism—the Republic of Labor—predetermines the absolute necessity of the Union, that is, economic organization, to reach the goal by, and to construct the goal with. Useful, and even necessary, though the political action, or political organization of Labor is, the Union is indispensable. A Union that can not strike or boycott is a meek scarecrow on which the capitalist buzzard may safely roost. The strike, or boycott, requires the picket. It follows that no picket, no Union; no Union, no Socialist Republic. The blow that smites the picket smites the Union, and bars with the ruins the path to the Socialist goal.

The court-made law that smote Unionism was the recent rulings of a Court under whose guidance a picketman, who in defence of his life against the picketed employer who assailed him murderously, shot his assailant dead, was sentenced for murder. Only a man engaged in a crime may not defend his life; only such a man is

guilty of murder if he takes the life of an assailant. The conviction for murder, through the action of the Court in question, of a picketman who defended his life amounts to the enactment of a law decreeing picketing a crime. Again—no picket, no Union; no Union, no Socialism. The leading phenomenon of present capitalist society is this high-handed blow it dealt at Socialism by the blow it dealt at Unionism. Accordingly, tested by the test of the duty of a party of Socialism to attack the existing system and expose its phenomena, it was the duty of any political party of Socialism to raise the outrage and reactionary deed into the paramount issue of the national political campaign.—That duty the S.L.P. fulfilled.

The second tenet is that **the candidates of a political party of Socialism should be men whose personality rather assists, and never hinders the propaganda.**

The picketman, in whose person the outrageous and reactionary phenomenon of outlawing picketing and thus smiting Unionism was perpetrated, was M.R. Preston, now in a Nevada penitentiary. Thus, Preston is, just now, the incarnation of the essential Socialist principle that turns around the necessity of Unionism, active, militant Unionism. Accordingly, tested by the test of the requisite personal qualifications of a Socialist candidate, Preston was the candidate designated by the course of events as the ideal candidate in aid of Socialist propaganda. It was the duty of any political party of Socialism to raise him up as the symbol of its propaganda, by placing him at the head of its ticket.

The third tenet is **to endeavor to simplify the issues, eschew ridiculousness, and manoeuvre for the aggressive instead of the defensive.**

The nomination of Preston meets each of these requirements.

In Preston's nomination the issue is brought down to the simplest of essentials.

In Preston's nomination the ridiculous has no place. The outcry from the capitalistic camp sounds not a single note of hilarity.

In Preston's nomination Socialism is decidedly on the aggressive. Not a single note of aggressiveness could the sharpest ear detect in the capitalist howl. It is the howl of the rage of the wounded beast of prey—at bay, perhaps; aggressive, not at all.

For the very reasons, from the very principles so felicitously set forth by

Warheit, it follows as an irrefutable conclusion that, so far from having made a mistake, the S.L.P. acted with the brilliant unerringness that only wisdom coupled to experience and unswerving loyalty to Socialism, commends; whereas, on the contrary, the mistake, aye, and the ugly blunder, lies with the S.P. for not having dared to do what the S.L.P. proved itself possessed of the knowledge and intrepidity to dare, for even having wholly ignored Preston and Smith—and worse yet, for succumbing as the S.P. is manifestly succumbing, to the outcry of the foe.

A party of Socialism whose standard of propriety is left for the capitalist foe to set, and whom the capitalist foe can intimidate to the point of causing its knees to shake—such a party is bulk without body, sound without substance; IT invites ridicule; IT is put to the defensive; only IT can throw “ridicule upon Socialism as a whole.”

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