

EDITORIAL

{THE CASE OF EPHRAIM SIFF.}

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE case of Ephraim Siff against the S.L.P. for the alleged recovery of an alleged indebtedness of about \$1,000 has finally reached its last stage. The S.L.P. triumphed; Siff, or the forces behind Siff, surrendered unconditionally, paying the heavy costs entailed by their venture, a venture intended as a raid upon the integrity of the Socialist or Labor Movement of the land.

The case being closed, the promise—made when announcing, last December, the decision of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, and, last month, the consequent dismissal of the case itself at the trial term,—to explain the great importance of the issue involved, can now be fulfilled.

In the December issue of *The People*, above referred to, it was stated: “Readers of *The People* may form an idea of the real issue involved, and may judge that the issue was not the \$1,000, but was something of further and deeper reach, from the circumstance that, at the time of the adverse decisions, now reversed, the S.P. press virtually ‘leaped out of its shirt’ with joy, and went so delirious, the *New Yorker Volkszeitung* leading, and Max Hayes’s *Cleveland Citizen* bringing up the rear, that the reports they gave of the case and the decision were insane enough to amuse, and to cause the knowing to enjoy in advance the laugh of him who laughs last.” The issue involved was the integrity of the Socialist Movement in that it involved the question, Shall the Movement own its press, or shall it be hamstrung, and made a subservient thing to a press?

The ten years’ experience which the Movement has had with the S.P. has established beyond peradventure the soundness of the S.L.P. principle of a Party-owned press. In the measure that experience demonstrated this, the S.P. press grew more nervous and abusive. That party’s system of a privately-owned press would have, of itself, exposed, not its weakness only, but its viciousness also. The

circumstance that the demonstration was accompanied by the contrast presented by the S.L.P. press exposed the evils of private ownership more glaringly, also more quickly. The corrupt moves made by the S.P. privately-owned press were found to be beyond the reach of the membership to redress: autocracy ever generates anarchy: the S.P. autocratic press bred anarchy all around: it invited individual schemes, which, in turn invited counter schemes. The principle put in practice became: “Cough up, and shut up.” A bona fide Socialist Movement can not survive such a system: the S.L.P. press pounded the private-ownership system, and rendered it less and less tenable in reason. The S.P. then took recourse to the Courts. It sought by the aid of the Courts to break down the S.L.P. press. Midnight seances were held by S.P. leaders and the “legal advisers” of Siff. It was a conspiracy that aimed at so twisting law, equity and reason as would have given the S.P. an argument by which to claim that “private ownership is the only safety of a paper.” The conspiracy was shattered.

Had Siff won, a new principle of Law would have been established, an old principle upset, and the corrupt and corrupting practice of private-ownership of a Socialist paper would have been irresistible. By stubbornly resisting the attempt and routing it, undismayed by the chicanery that frequently marked the tactics of the conspirators, the S.L.P. has won for the Movement a victory the importance of which will be more and more appreciated as time goes by.

The experience of the race, collected in what is legitimately called Law, could not but coincide with elemental principles of the race’s freedom. Such principles are peculiarly active in revolutionary Movements. One of these principles is—Own your press, or the press will own you.

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