

EDITORIAL

THE S.P. UNION PLANK.

By DANIEL DE LEON

WHAT is the task of a Party of Socialism? Is it to lead, or is it to be led, forward?

The Labor or Union plank of the Socialist party reads as follows:

“In the face of the economic and political aggressions of the capitalist class the only reliance left the workers is that of their economic organizations and their political power. By the intelligent and class conscious use of these they may resist successfully the capitalist class, break the fetters of wage slavery, and fit themselves for the future society, which is to displace the capitalist system. The Socialist party appreciates the full significance of class organization and urges the wage earners, the working farmers and all other useful workers everywhere to organize for economic and political action, and we pledge ourselves to support the toilers of the fields as well as those in the shops, factories and mines of the nation in their struggle for economic justice.”

What answer does this plank make to the question above propounded?

The Union is no temporary makeshift, it is no stepping-stone towards the Socialist Republic, to be discarded and left behind, neglected and forgotten soon as the goal is reached. The Union is an integral part of the Socialist Republic. It is the constituency of the parliament of the Republic of Labor, or Socialism. No Union, no Social Revolution, and no Socialist Republic.

A formation so essential to the Socialist Republic is, at least, a means to that end. Means are determined by the ends they contemplate. A means that contemplates, and necessarily must contemplate, the Social Revolution, and after that, the filling of the role of the constituency of the governmental system which that revolution is to bring with it,—such a means can not, under any imaginable conditions, be an agency of capitalism. It can not be even conservative, let alone reactionary. Such a means, such a Union must be revolutionary, that is, it must be class conscious,

hence, it must be conscious of its goal.

If the task and mission of a party of Socialism is to LEAD, then its duty is defined by the role of the Union in the accomplishment of the revolution. Then a party of Socialism may not be neutral on the subject without it deserts its colors: then a party of Socialism is bound to “take sides”: it is bound to criticise, expose and condemn reactionary economic organizations; it is bound, furthermore, definitely and in unmistakable language to pronounce itself in favor of the Unionism that is adequate to its mission, or, if such Unionism is not yet in existence, marshal the workers to the Union path that they should tread.

The Union plank of the S.P. does none of these. Its preachment on the subject is more spineless than the jelly fish; more vague than the mists over running waters; more “weak, stale and unprofitable” than the courtesies on the ball-room floor; more putty-faced than a politician’s countenance; as promiscuous of support as a puzzled diplomat.

What answer does the S.P. Union plank make to the question propounded at the head of this article—what answer does the plank make on that particular, that burning question, now more burning than ever? The answer is:

“A party of Socialism, as the S.P. understands the thing, is not there to educate—that requires knowledge, and knowledge that is insisted upon makes envious enemies; it is not there to lead—that requires convictions, and convictions are tyrannous. The S.P., hence, is not there to lead, but to be led, pushed, shoved, and kicked forward—or overboard”?

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