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EDITORIAL

FARMERS AND WAGE WORKERS.

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THE Socialists of Massachusetts are preparing to place a State ticket in the field for the coming fall campaign. They will have no difficulty in getting the 1,000 signatures required by the ballot law, and with active work they will certainly succeed in polling a vote that will surprise the country and may even surprise them.

The People's Party, as a farmers' party and upon its present platform, cannot be extensively organized in Massachusetts, where the purely agricultural interest is comparatively insignificant; but the Western farmers' movement will nevertheless act, and is already acting, upon the wage-workers of that great manufacturing State, as an incentive to independent political action on the lines plainly marked out by their industrial conditions. In other words, the movement of political independence which is manifesting itself among the Western farmers by the organization of a powerful agricultural party, will manifest itself among the wage-working populations of such States as Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania and others similarly conditioned, by a corresponding growth of the Socialist Labor party.

And right here let us observe, in order to remove any doubt that may exist in the minds of some concerning our position, that in so far as upon certain points the ground of discontent and the aims of the two classes—small farmers and wage-workers—may be substantially alike, the two movements may for a time be made to follow their respective courses without considerable friction or serious antagonism. For instance, both classes are oppressed by transportation, banking, trading, manufacturing and mining monopolies; and although the Cincinnati platform is wonderfully indefinite as to the means proposed for the national control of those monopolies, it is a well known fact that the Western farmers are at one with the Eastern wage-workers in believing that such

control—in the case of the railroads especially—can only be obtained through national ownership and operation. Again, the farmers have an interest in developing the purchasing power of the mechanics and operatives. Therefore, if the farmers in the West and the wage-workers in the East succeeded in respectively electing to Congress a number of representatives sufficient to carry any measure upon which they would be united, much might be gained by the wage-workers, whose representatives could force the passage of measures—such as an effective eight-hour law and other important “first steps,” or “palliatives”—to which the farmers might otherwise feel indifferent.

The duration and extent of this *entente cordials*, or co-operation, of the two classes, one of which is still largely imbued with individualistic ideas of private property in the means of production, would largely depend on economic developments under the new conditions. If the immediate result of the new measures were a marked relief in the situation of the farming class as indebted property holders, we might expect the latter to become every day more conservative; whereas any improvement in the condition of the wage workers would inevitably tend to render these more radical. Then, of course, co-operation would cease, until the temporary relief gained by the small farmers had been lost again through the natural operation of the fundamental laws of the capitalistic system, which nothing short of its complete removal can permanently prevent.

It is thus seen that the two movements, though perfectly distinct, may for a time run alongside of each other until another turning point is reached on the road to progress through the dark woods of capitalism; and it is unquestionable that considerable advance may be gained in that way—a way, to be sure, that is not of our own selection and in no degree to our taste, but that seems marked out by evolution under the present economic, political and mental conditions of the various classes of society in the United States.

These two movements, we say, are perfectly distinct; and we may add that they must remain so. The greatest misfortune, indeed, that might occur would be the merging of the Eastern proletariat movement into that of the Western farmers—a merging that will not fail to be advocated, in the name of unity, by mistaken men and designing politicians.

At a time when it is more necessary than it ever was to clearly formulate the

ultimate aims and immediate demands of the proletariat, such a step would involve a most dangerous—ever so temporary—abandonment of the fundamental principles of the labor movement.

After many years of hard work in the field of agitation and of harder experience in the economic field, these principles are not only beginning to be well understood by many but are actually underlying the organization of every trade and permeating the masses in all great centers of industry. The step we speak of would again confuse the minds, retard education, and postpone the day of intelligent action. Any attempt to force it must therefore be resisted, and it cannot be more effectually defeated than by placing Socialist tickets in the field this year in all the manufacturing States of the East. Not only will such action, if followed up by vigorous agitation, keep the Labor movement on its true lines, but it will rather promote than impede the natural development of the People's party in the West. It will do more. It will enlighten the wage-workers engaged in agriculture, who may for the present be expected to cast their lot, politically, with the small farmers, but who, later on, must join the grand army of the proletariat in its final battle for emancipation.

It is needless to add that the great international movement of labor, through the influence that the Brussels Congress this fall will inevitably exert upon the wage-working classes of this country, will greatly aid the Socialist Labor party in the performance of its plain duty.

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