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FIRST EDITORIAL

GIVE THE DEVIL HIS DUE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

A NEW party—the American Bimetallic party—has been set on foot. The principles of the party, in a nut-shell, are: “The impoverished condition of the people is due wholly to a wrongful financial system; a rightful financial system consists in free coinage at the ‘constitutional’ rate of 16 to 1.”

It is difficult to imagine more nonsense in so small a compass. Yet for all that, the new party deserves credit for one thing —honesty.

There is no important political party but is prompted by and built upon some one central idea, and that a material one. The central idea of the Democratic party was, forty years ago, the material interests of the copperhead slaveholders; accordingly, whatever the differences in the Democratic factions, slavery and the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave law were their leading plank. The central idea of the Republican party down to 1867 was the material interests of the Northern capitalists; they needed, in order to develop property, the absolute freedom of the workers to compete for work and thus cut their own throats; accordingly, all shades of “Republicanism” announced as their political faith their unalterable opposition to the Fugitive Slave law, and the principle that “freedom was the normal condition of the whole territory of the United States.” Neither of these parties either disguised its purpose or hid it away among a heap of pretty frills, or cumbered it up with foreign matter to catch votes. It was not until after the issue between them was finally settled and they ceased to have a reason for separate existence that their platforms became a collection of empty words.

More recently a good-sized class in the country realized that its existence was

threatened. The middle class found itself unable to compete with the large capitalists in factory or farm. It tried to buoy itself up by loans. That only hastened its downfall. It became a debtor class hard pushed. Its material interests, ill understood, of course, as is the case with all sinking or superannuated classes, prompted the wish for cheap money whereby to rid itself of its debt. Unredeemable paper money was its ideal. It tried several years ago to move upon those lines and failed. Lately, by pooling its issues with the silver mine barons, it went on the slant of free coinage of silver at the preposterous rate of 16 to 1, and set up a party with that object in view. Thus was born the Populist party. Although many honest elements of different class interests flocked to that standard, their presence did not affect the inherent character of Populism. The men who concocted the party were pronounced enough upon what they were after, but dishonestly and foolishly, as dishonesty always is, they stuck to their platform a lot of planks that, without any particular meaning, were just suggestive enough to rope in the unwary. Thus it came to pass that the platform of this middle class political uprising looked more like sticky fly paper than anything else.

But the atmosphere of the political field cannot long brook humbug. Accordingly, at the same time that we find the Republican and Democratic capitalists proposing to unite upon one platform, a capitalist “business” platform, we find the elements that had really called Populism into being, and who have clear-cut material interest{s} to subserve, tearing loose from the fly-paper Omaha platform and launching a new party upon a well-defined straightforward, uncompromising platform—the platform that begins and ends with the demand for free coinage at the rate of 16 to 1, and which, if successful, will enable the middle class to pay off a dollar’s debt with 45 cents; and the middle class employer of labor to pay off his hands one-half their wages.

All honor to the American Bimetallic party for its political straightforwardness. If the Democrats and Republicans will but follow suit and carry out the plan of joining upon an outspoken plutocratic platform, there will be next year a three-cornered Presidential fight between the three class-conscious elements of our population:

The plutocrats or capitalists, upon a single gold standard basis and “business”

principles of skinning the workers—the Demo-Republican party.

The middle class, or would-be capitalists, upon a depreciated currency basis and likewise labor-skinning principles, the American Bimetallic party; and

The proletariat or working class, upon the basis of the abolition of the wage system of slavery and the overthrow of the capitalist system of robbery—the Socialist Labor party.

The field is clearing. The sooner the issues stand out plain, the sooner our inevitable victory.

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