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EDITORIAL

‘A Pure and Simple’ Philosophy of History

By DANIEL DE LEON

Every one approximately informed on the American Labor movement must be familiar with the claims put forth by the pure and simplers some time ago. “New Trade Unionism,” the “unification of the economic and political movement of the workers,”—such an idea was decried with all the paste-board arguments borrowed from the capitalist orators’ repertory. It was denounced as un-American, and “pure simplicity” was lauded, or at least justified, as a “natural” thing, the other being of course unnatural.

Into that camp of false history, falser philosophy and still falser tactics we threw the shells of fact. We showed that the labor organization that separated the political from the economic action was “natural” only at the times and in the countries where the workers were disfranchised, consequently, were deprived of the political weapon of redress, and that in the countries where and at the times when they did not labor under such political disadvantage, to strip their organizations of the political feature was, not only not “natural,” but about as unnatural a thing as could be well imagined. With historical facts we showed that just as soon as, in the Twenties, the workers of New York had acquired the right of suffrage they shaped their labor organizations upon the improved plane that their newly acquired political rights gave them, and joined their political activity to their economic efforts. Finally we proved that the phenomenon of un-American “pure and simple” labor organizations in America to-day was explainable only by the large influx of British “pure and simple” unionists, who imported into this country as “natural” notions that were here “unnatural,” and that those who followed their tactics were simply parrots and apes imitating and repeating without a consciousness of just what they were about.

This cannonade could not fail of effect. Under it the professors of the school of the “pure and simple” abortion have been wriggling that it is a pleasure to behold. One of them, P.J. Maguire, “First Vice-President of the A.F. of L.,” whatever that may mean, is now frantically seeking to rehabilitate as “American” this imported product of British political slavery. In seeking to accomplish this fact, this “Vice-President”

furnishes a fresh proof of the intellectual imbecility of the element into whose guiding hands the American Labor Movement had the misfortune of tumbling. Says he:

“The trades union movement [meaning the ‘pure and simple movement’] is older in this country than the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution of the United States.”

In other words, a thing is “American” or “un-American” to-day, not by reason of its fitting or non-fitting with our present political institutions, but by reason of seniority. If that be so, then the British Crown and Parliament, both of which prevailed in this country prior to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, are pre-eminently “American”!! A better proof of intellectual imbecility, a funnier caricature of the “philosophy” of history could not be manufactured to order.

No. Just as soon as in this country the suffrage became the property of the workers, the British form of unionism ceased to be “natural,” it became a monstrosity, it was and continues to be repellant to our American political opportunities, and, as a result of all that, it has hitherto neutralized the chances open to the American proletariat for their own and their fellows’ liberation.

But the pure and simple abortion has shriveled to a mummy fit only for the dime museum, and is beyond resurrection. New Trade Unionism in American, though long suppressed, is rapidly possessing the field; with its superior morals and intellect it is purifying the air, and thus making its ultimate victory sure.

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

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