

EDITORIAL

THE “WISCONSIN IDEA.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

TO judge from Victor L. Berger’s conception of the anatomy of his Labor Movement, the gentleman stands a good chance of having both his ears boxed with his own hands.

Mr. Berger refers to the Labor Movement as a body with two arms—an economic, or trades union arm, and a political arm. He then adds that “both arms belong to the same body.” That is sound anatomy: both the arms of a body belong to it, not to different bodies. He says further that “both arms must work in perfect harmony and help each other.” No objection can be found to this either in point of anatomy, or in point of morals: indeed, there is high classic authority in its support: ancient Roman wisdom long ago ascertained that “manus manum levat” (one hand washes the other). But how does all this square with Mr. Berger’s closing theory to the effect that “each arm is to do its own work and shall not interfere with the other’s business”?

With the human body, one arm often is compelled to “interfere” very decidedly and effectively “with the other’s business.” If lameness is the business of the left arm, then the right arm is bound to interfere with the left. If the right arm takes it into its “head” to bleed, it is the bounden duty of the left arm to stop the flow. If the anatomy contemplated by Mr. Berger is the anatomy of the human body then the “interference” of one arm of the Labor Movement “with the other arm’s business” is anatomically a sociologic unavoidableness. The same blood (membership) that circulates in one arm circulates in the other arm of a Labor Movement. Every issue of importance, and many of no importance, in the economic arm, is carried directly into the political. The anti-immigration blood corpuscles, for instance, of Mr. Berger’s Labor Movement’s political arm are squirted into it by the direct “interference” of the blood corpuscles of the gentleman’s Movement’s economic arm.

Here is “interference” with a vim.

If, however, there is to be really no “interference” of one arm with the other in Mr. Berger’s Labor Movement, then the anatomy the gentleman contemplates is not the human but the Jumping-Jack anatomy—an anatomic system in which the limbs, all the four, attend to their business, the one altogether unconcerned about the others.

In either case the holder of such views is in a pickle. The two arms of such a man’s “Labor Movement” may each leave the other uninterfered with, but only because they have the hands, or fists, at their extremities busy boxing the luckless man’s ears.

And that is the “Wisconsin Idea.”

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