

EDITORIAL

OPEN LETTER TO DR. KARL LIEBKNECHT.

By DANIEL DE LEON

T O Dr. Karl Liebknecht,
En tour in the United States,
Comrade:—



As a delegate of the German Social Democracy to the International Congress at Copenhagen you will remember that, a Resolution on Unity from the French delegation being before the house, I called upon the delegation of the Socialist party to take the platform and make statement of what the Congress had to expect of them in the matter. Six years before, at Amsterdam, the first resolution for Unity came up, and although it was boisterously applauded by the S.P. delegation, the officers of the S.P. rejected the unity proposition made by the Socialist Labor Party. In view of that the Copenhagen Congress was entitled to know whether the equally boisterous applause bestowed by the S.P. delegation upon the second Resolution on Unity was to be taken seriously, or was only a platonic demonstration. And I added that, as far as the S.L.P. was concerned, it stood ready to unite upon no conditions other than the principles enunciated by the International Congress—liberal immigration; the recognition of the permanent and revolutionary mission of the economic organization, that is Unionism; and minority representation.

You will also remember the answer officially made by the S.P. delegation—“unity had already been effected in America”; “the S.L.P. did not exist”; “what was left of the S.L.P. was one man who had whimsical notions about Unionism, was an enemy of the Labor Movement, and spent his time in heaping abuse upon the S.P.”

Notwithstanding the rush of your tour in America it cannot be otherwise than that you will perceive more than one fact which does not square with the allegation that “the S.L.P. does not exist.” Notwithstanding the Chinese Wall that the S.P. tries to raise around you, lest you discover facts detrimental to their fiction of “unity being already effected in America,” quite enough facts must have leaped over the Wall, or peeped through its chinks, conclusively establishing the existence of an active and virile S.L.P. Movement in the land.

The actual, facts, however fractionally they may reach, cannot choose but puzzle you. The question is bound to rise to your mind—

What’s it all about?

Although your tour in America is primarily agitational in the interest of Socialism in general, and not undertaken for purposes of observation, investigation and study, the presentation of a little bunch of certain facts, facts that are fresh and readily verified, will surely be welcomed. They will afford you an insight into the “lay of the land”; they will be of assistance in further inquiries; they will throw light upon “what’s it all about.”

In February of this year the trolley employes of Philadelphia, the third city of the land, rebelled for better conditions. They went on strike. Goaded by the cynic brutality of both the Company and the political administration of the city, the central body, in which almost all the Unions of Philadelphia were represented, considered, deliberated and finally decided to stand by their struggling fellow proletarians of the trolley lines. A general strike was voted and ordered—and the order was obeyed by almost all the Unions. Among the few Unions that answered the order with flat disobedience were the Philadelphia Locals of the United Brewery Workmen of America, with headquarters in Cincinnati, O., although they had themselves voted, on the central body, for the order calling out the workmen of the city on a general strike.

The act of the large majority of the industrial proletariat of Philadelphia was a healthy manifestation of Labor solidarity; the act of the brewery workers was an act of ignominious desertion.

In sight of this double manifestation the Socialist press of the land divided:—

The press of the S.L.P. applauded the strike; poured into Philadelphia all the

agitational literature that it could in order to invigorate the men in battle; and, consistently with such conduct, it condemned the desertion of the brewery Locals.

The press of the S.P., on the contrary, while it also boomed the strike, yet, with typical inconsistency, approved the deserters' conduct either with silence, or even outspokenly. In this outspoken approval the S.P. organ, the Philadelphia *Tageblatt*, set the pace, and was closely followed by another S.P. paper, the *New Yorker Volkszeitung*. On March 19 of this year, the strike being then at its height, and increased pressure being brought upon the brewery workers to join, the Philadelphia *Tageblatt* came out with a leading editorial sustaining the brewers in their desertion of their fellow workers—sustaining them in the same breath that the paper admitted that the brewers owed to these very workers the favorable economic conditions which they, the brewers, enjoyed. And the *New Yorker Volkszeitung* of the next day, March 20, reproduced the bulk of that *Tageblatt* editorial with obvious satisfaction.

Nor was this all. Amid the approval, on the part of the S.P. press, that silence implies, but loud condemnation by the S.L.P., the *Tageblatt* published at frequent intervals, running all the way during the strike, a series of articles entitled, "Transit Gespraechen" (Transit Talks), in which the strike was ridiculed, calumniated and stabbed in the back;—and these articles were furnished by the Rapid Transit Company against which the strike was on,—and they were paid for with cash. See, for instance, *Tageblatt* of March 10, 1910.

Nor yet was this all. At this fall's convention of the Brewery workers they rewarded the S.P. with a \$1,000 bonus for its conduct during the Philadelphia strike. Where an organization supports a party with moneys and withholds its votes the gift is a bribe. It goes without saying that when Socialism is bribed it is not bribed in the interest of Socialism.

Only one little bunch of facts is here cited. Upon inquiry and investigation you will be able to multiply them indefinitely.

In the *Neue Zeit* for last September 16, J. Karski, writing upon the late Copenhagen Congress, refers to the "lamentable fact that the English and American Trades Unions are not permeated with the spirit of the class struggle." And he correctly adds: "Where this spirit is lacking, neither can the sense of international

solidarity assert itself.” Leaving England aside, Karski’s charge is true, and so is his conclusion. The opportunity for international solidarity to arise is next to none where national solidarity is hacked to pieces; and the opportunity for national solidarity to develop is blocked if the hacking to pieces is done under the shield of a party that calls itself Socialist, and to the orchestration of ribald denunciations of the S.L.P. for preaching the doctrine of the class struggle, and condignly castigating its shameful violations.

What the capitalist cannot himself do in the way of benumbing and smashing the Spirit of the Class Struggle, he leaves for his paid “Labor Lieutenants” in the Unions to do; and what not even these can do becomes vastly easier for a body that sails under the colors of Socialism to accomplish. True enough the S.P. disclaims all sympathy with the Civic Federation, the capitalist patron of the A.F. of L. and kindred bodies. True enough the S.P. even denounces the Civic Federation—

“But Esau’s hand suits ill with Jacob’s voice.”

The little bunch of facts cited above serves also as a sample illustration to dispose of a very common delusion, the delusion that the S.P. fits American conditions better than does the S.L.P. The little bunch of facts cited above demonstrates the S.P. to be a purblind imitation of European conditions absent in America. In Europe such abortions as Civic Federationized Unions are known only as horrible exceptions. In America they are the horrible rule. One more evidence of this may be gathered from the most significant fact that the non-Union staff of the Victoria Cafeteria in San Francisco walked out this very month so soon as it was announced that the A.F. of L. culinary Unions were about to “unionize” the establishment. Those non-Union, unorganized workers, held, based upon an extensive experience, that so long as the A.F. of L. “unionized” the place wages would be cut all around and intenser work forced upon them. European tactics, under such circumstances, are inapplicable here. In fact a careful ascertaining of the facts and weighing of them exposes the S.P. as a misfit in America. The slump in the S.P. vote proves the fact; the S.P.-man A.M. Simons’ statement that his party had become a hissing and a by-word with the actual wage earners of America corroborates the fact; the colossal circumstance that the *New Yorker Volkszeitung*,

which once enjoyed a circulation of about 25,000 has, despite the increase in the population of German proletarians, dropped probably below 5,000, accentuates the fact.

The little bunch of facts cited above, as a sample, may help you to understand the situation in America, and enable you to pick your way independently in the course of further inquiry.

The little bunch of facts accounts for the S.L.P.'s vitality against all odds, and assures its indestructibility.

The little bunch of facts accounts for the persistent opposition on the part of the leadership of the S.P. to treat with the S.L.P. as a body, and to decline all Unity except with members individually. In no other way could the S.L.P. be throttled, and the S.P. have full swing.

The little bunch of facts accounts for the S.L.P.'s firm determination not to disband. To disband would be to desert the Cause of the American wing of the International.

Finally, the little bunch of facts proves the necessity of Unity,—speedy Unity, upon the principles of the International Congress—the principles of liberal immigration and the recognition of the revolutionary mission of the economic organization, without which the Spirit of the Class Struggle cannot rise in America, and neither international nor national solidarity assert themselves; and the principle of minority representation, without which the individual S.L.P. member would otherwise become a sharer in the responsibility for all other “little bunches of fact” that the S.P. may and would otherwise undoubtedly engender.

Fraternally,

EDITOR DAILY PEOPLE.

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