

Preceding the ST&LA

“Preceding the ST&LA” was originally published in the Tenth Anniversary edition of the DAILY PEOPLE on July 3, 1910. For all intents and purposes, the article was forgotten until it was republished for the first time in THE PEOPLE in 1986. However, the importance of the article is attested to by the fact that the National Executive Sub-Committee of the SLP authorized its publication in pamphlet form in January 1915. Apparently the pamphlet never appeared, most likely for lack of funds to print it, but that does not detract from its interest.

The author, whose identity is not known, but who must have played apart in the story he or she tells, provides an insightful and well-documented look into a little known, but tremendously important chapter from the history of the American labor movement. Namely, as the title implies, it is an examination of the events that led to the formation of the first explicitly socialist labor union in the United States, the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance, in December 1895.

The article tells the SLP and ST&LA side of events that have been repeatedly distorted and misused by the party’s enemies for no other purpose than to discredit the SLP and to bury beyond redemption the facts of how organized workers, sickened by corruption and class collaboration within the old Knights of Labor and the “American Federation of Hell,” as it was once aptly called, rebelled and undertook the formidable task of building a real union, based without compromise upon working-class interests, in defiance of the established bodies.

That story has a lesson to impart, the lesson being that such a thing can be done when workers take the notion into their heads. And it knocks to pieces the contention that workers who undertake such a task, and that the only political party that has ever supported workers in such an endeavor, are “union wreckers” and “splitters.

“Preceding the ST&LA” was republished in THE PEOPLE in 1986 in conjunction with the 90th anniversary of the SLP’s decision to endorse the ST&LA. That decision is one of which the party is justly proud despite the aspersions that have been thrown upon it by everyone from the AFL itself, to the so-called Socialist Party (whose origin was partly explained by the emergence of the ST&LA), and a host of “academics” and “historians,” a good sized number of whom built their reputations and careers as such in part, or entirely, on efforts to discredit the SLP in the eyes of the American worker.

The unknown author of the article was no academic with a career to carve out in the “world of letters.” The author—man or woman—was a worker, wrote as a worker, and provides today’s reader with an intelligent and intelligible glimpse behind the veil of antisocialist and antiworking-class propaganda that too often passes as genuine history.

—R.B.

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By X. L. Y., New York.

To most men enrolled in the socialist movement today, the story of the S.T. & L.A. (Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance) is a closed book, though it is only a short span since the organization was launched—15 years ago—and five years ago since it was merged into the Industrial Workers of the World. If, however, the story of this S.T. & L.A. is not generally known, there are not wanting those to whom the name is familiar. There are many who occasionally hear reference made to the “S.T. & L.A.,” but too often they hear only slander, vilification, and abuse—this from Socialist Party sources. And since the Alliance, as the S.T. & L.A. was familiarly designated, was, in a sense, a child of the Socialist Labor Party, the calumny heaped upon the former reacts upon the latter, and to that extent a dread and fear for the party is engendered in newcomers to the socialist movement when receiving their first lessons in the history of socialism in this country.

This horror for the S.L.P. is patent to all; yet it is a horror akin to that which parents instill in their children to make them comply with their desires. And it may be pertinently remarked that such is the way the leaders of the S.P. look upon their membership; as a lot of children, or worse, as a lot of dupes, who should simply believe, but not question, for to do the latter is disconcerting, “disturbing.” It might here be remarked, incidentally, that for one to accept implicitly the wildest kind of statements against another and proceed thereupon to condemn, at all events to shut one’s ears to the claims of that other person or organization, as the case may be, is decidedly one-sided, decidedly partisan, illogical, unfair, and above all, unworthy of one who would be a socialist. The rising recruits to socialism owe it a duty to themselves, as well as the cause they hold dear, to examine the tales they hear about the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance and of the Socialist Labor Party, for the reason that today the socialist movement in this land is in a far from satisfactory state and because there are two different tendencies in that movement.

Knowing that a prejudice exists against the Socialist Labor Party and believing that a better understanding of historical facts will aid materially to remove this prejudice and thereby help bring the opposing tendencies nearer together, the present article is written. It will not deal with the career of the

S.T. & L.A. nor of the SLP, but will be devoted to dispelling the myths concerning the launching of the former.

The Split of 1899

As is well-known, and as may be easily ascertained, in the year 1899 a split took place in the Socialist Labor Party over the question of the party's attitude toward trade unionism. In 1896, that is, three years earlier, the party's national convention had endorsed the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance by an overwhelming vote, 71 for to 6 against. Subsequently party conventions in state after state endorsed and re-endorsed the Alliance. Not only did state organizations thus place their stamp of approval upon the Alliance, they also actively furthered the propaganda for it. National organizers, state organizers, sections, and individual members at all times urged workingmen and trade unions to organize under the banner of the new trade union. But the A.F. of L. leaders fiercely resisted the advance, and stopped at nothing, fair or foul, to hinder its progress. As may be imagined, an uphill fight lay before the new organization. (Let it be understood that a stubborn contest will ever confront the effort to give the workers a sound organization, a thing which yet must be done.) Despite the storm raging around it, the party and the Alliance forged ahead gloriously, so much so that, whereas in 1896 the party received 36,000 votes, two years later it polled 82,000. In the face of this fact of progress there were some who lamented that the party's endorsement of the Alliance was checking the growth of Socialism in the country.

But there were interests in the party who could not stand the pressure. Newspapers, such as the *New Yorker Volkszeitung* and the *Philadelphia Tageblatt*, who drew largely upon the A.F. of L. unions for revenue, at first covertly opposed the Alliance and then became more open and pronounced in their hostility to it. They gathered about themselves a weak-hearted, weak-kneed element who shrunk before the fury which the labor fakers raised. In July 1899, when this anti-Alliance element thought they had mustered strength enough in New York City to capture the national administration of the party, they made what was meant to be a "coup d'état," but which ignominiously failed.

The split in the party followed, the splitters-off claiming that the Alliance was never meant to be taken up in the measure that the party was doing and that anyhow the Alliance was "sprung as a surprise," as a trick, upon the

1896 convention of the party and, consequently, like all “surprises,” like all being taken unawares, was not entitled to respect or support.’¹

Opponents’ Accusations

We shall take up this matter of “surprise.” But first let us specifically quote these charges. In his *History of Socialism in the United States*, edition of 1903, p. 323, M. Hillquit makes the charge in these words: “When the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance was first organized and sprung as a surprise on the convention of 1896, some delegates had considerable misgivings as to the innovation.” And N.I. Stone, (S.P.), in a pamphlet, *The Attitude of the Socialists Toward the Trade Unions*, published in 1900, has a lengthier passage, which it is well to give. It occurs on p. 6 and is as follows:

The S.T. & L.A. was the most unique example of a socialist trade union anti-pure-and-simple organization in the annals of labor history. . . .

We, socialists, love to pride ourselves of the superior nature of our movement, which, we say, is due to the fact that it is not the result of a scheme hatched out in the brain of some great mind among us. Such a thing is impossible with us, we claim, because there are in the first place no “master” minds among us, at least to the extent of having the power to execute anything without the consent of the rank and file, and second, because we believe that movements must come as a natural product of events to have a chance to grow and develop naturally. If we needed an example of a movement that in every respect did not come up to these requirements it was the S.T. & L.A. It came down upon us full-fledged from top to bottom as the masterpiece of our “Master Workman” and *took us by surprise*; but take it did.

Now there is no foundation in fact for either of these accusations. On the contrary, the records distinctly controvert the claims of these two men, Hillquit and Stone, and knock to pieces the assertions which they palm off as truthful on an unsuspecting audience.

¹ Though the party always maintained the right of anyone to differ with the established policy of the party, and to voice his objection in party council, it nevertheless insisted that these differences be confined to inside business; it tolerated no “knocking” of itself in public. Public disavowal of an organization’s tactics means open hostility, and that means that the individual has no place in the organization. As there were some who committed such breaches, and had not the decency to disconnect themselves from the party, they were helped out; hence the cry and charge of “bossism,” “intolerance,” etc.

So far from coming down “full-fledged as the masterpiece of the ‘Master Workman,’” the Alliance was patterned closely upon the form of organization of the Knights of Labor. This is admitted by Hillquit, even in his *History*, page 303. So far from being “sprung as a surprise,” the Alliance was but the converging of the currents which preceded it in the Central Labor Federations in and around New York City and of the movements along C.L.F. lines in cities farther away. The Alliance was organized to give the workers a socialist labor union, a union with which they could successfully cope with the capitalist class and eventually overthrow it. In pursuit of this object the new organization availed itself of forms and methods then in vogue in the Knights of Labor and in the Central Labor Federation, as shall be shown, and it will be seen that it was far from being the creation of one man’s brain, as assiduously but falsely charged by opponents.

Events Before the Alliance

The Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance was started in New York City in December 1895. But for five years preceding, there existed in this city the Central Labor Federation, which began its career in June 1890, as a central body of socialist trade unionists, whose rallying cry was “New Trade Unionism,” which consisted in independent political action along with an economic organization of the working class. Previous to the Central Labor Federation’s policy of an independent movement, it had been affiliated with the Central Labor Union, the centrally organized pure and simple trade unions. The affiliation, or rather amalgamation, between the C.L.F. and the C.L.U. occurred in December 1889. In agreeing to amalgamate, the C.L.F. insisted on straightforward action in behalf of the working class—there had previously been some corrupt politics perpetrated by C.L.U. leaders. Accordingly, upon reorganization, a committee had been appointed to revise the constitution of the C.L.U. At the session of April 13, 1890, this committee reported and among the amendments proposed was the following significant pledge for delegates:

*And I further promise not to allow my name to be used in connection with any political question relative to the old political parties, while acting as a delegate to this body.*²

² Central Labor Union Report, *Workman’s Advocate*, April 18, 1890.

This pledge was adopted by an overwhelming majority.

The union of the two central bodies, however, was destined to be short-lived, and in two months, on June 15, 1890, after the above clause was adopted by the C.L.U., a rupture occurred, following which the Central Labor Federation was at once reorganized.

It will be enlightening to know the cause of this rupture. On May Day in 1890, the Socialist Labor Party had held a monster demonstration at Union Square. The Central Labor Union had co-operated to make the celebration a success. Though a pelting rain descended, there were 20,000 people representing 70 organizations who turned out to participate. The affair was rightly considered a pronounced success. Encouraged by this signal demonstration for the International Labor Day and for the eight-hour demand, the joint sections of the Socialist Labor Party in New York City (American, German, and Jewish sections), on May 22, 1890, decided to enter the political campaign for that fall. In fact, three days earlier, May 19, 1890, the American section, S.L.P., first moved this matter at its meeting. The news at once spread in labor union circles, and a stir was quickly manifest. The move was highly welcomed by the working men and it was felt that labor was at last about to take a decisive step in its own behalf politically. The political henchmen of the old parties of capitalism, however, were not inert. They were ready with a countermove, and a week later, May 25, 1890, *the Central Labor Union decided for independent political action.*³

The maneuvers of these gentry had been anticipated by the English and German papers of the Socialist Labor Party, the *Workman's Advocate* and the *N.Y. Volkszeitung* (at that time the *Volkszeitung* was S.L.P.). The corrupt machinations of several C.L.U. leaders in the political campaign of 1889 were exposed by both papers.⁴ The exposure was more than the crooked pack in the C.L.U. could stand and they demanded vengeance; they insisted that the reporters of the two labor papers be excluded from C.L.U. sessions. Their first demand met with defeat, they had 31 on their side but 39 against them. But they were not to be denied; the presence of the labor reporters was a thorn in their side; it was inimical to further corrupt manipulation. So at the very next meeting, June 8, 1890, the same motion to exclude was made. This time it carried, 43 to 41. Thereupon many of the former C.L.F. delegation,

³ Central Labor Union Report, *Workman's Advocate*, May 31, 1890.

⁴ See article, "Corruption," *Workman's Advocate*, May 31, 1890, and subsequent issues.

together with others, withdrew and on June 15, one week after the infamous act of debarment, 85 delegates representing 39 unions gathered at 385 Bowery to take emphatic action against these outrages. The delegates adopted the following resolutions:

Whereas, the Central Labor Union of New York has proved itself of no benefit whatever to organized labor; and

Whereas, on the contrary, its course has clearly shown that, as it now exists, the said Central Labor Union tends to disorganization and disruption through a persistent support of dishonest schemes and dishonest schemers; therefore be it

Resolved, That we, the representatives of bona fide open trades and labor unions, hereby declare ourselves willing and ready to reorganize the former Central Labor Federation of New York, and be it further

Resolved, That a committee of five be appointed or elected to arrange for a meeting to be held next Sunday, June 22, for the aforesaid purpose; also to apply to the American Federation of Labor for the old charter, and in general make all necessary arrangements for the reorganization of said Central Labor Federation of New York.⁵

It is sufficient here to say that with reference to the effort to secure its old charter from Gompers, the C.L.F. failed. Gompers made the excuse that the C.L.F. admitted delegates from the S.L.P. to its body, and that, as there were supposed to be “no politics in the union,” and as the S.L.P. was a political party, the C.L.F., in admitting the party, was not entitled to a charter. There is no need to reproduce the decisive arguments which were advanced against and which controverted Gompers and, later on the 1890 A.F. of L. convention in Detroit, which also refused to grant the C.L.F. a charter; it is enough to say that when the S.L.P. itself finally withdrew from the C.L.F., the A.F. of L. still refused to grant the charter.⁶

It will be interesting next to note the trend toward a national socialist trade union, as opposed to the pure and simple unions then in existence, a trend which culminated in the launching of the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance. No sooner had the Central Labor Federation been restarted than it issued on July 3, 1890, this pronouncement to the remaining organizations in the C.L.U., and called upon them to withdraw:

⁵ See “For Separation,” *Workman’s Advocate*, June 21, 1890.

⁶ C.L.F. Report, in *The People*, June 11, 1893.

For years there have been men in the Central Labor Union who, instead of attending exclusively and conscientiously to the interests of labor, have notoriously neglected and betrayed those interests and unscrupulously acted as the direct or indirect agents of the local political parties.

Prominent among men of this character stands James P. Archibald, who from the very seat of recording secretary which he still occupies, openly boasted of having received \$60 for his services for the Democratic Party.

And instead of expelling him for contempt, your delegates not only sustained him but expelled the reporters of the only labor papers of this city because these papers contended that such a man was not a fit representative of labor.

After enumerating a number of instances where the Central Labor Union disregarded the interests of its membership, the call of the Central Labor Federation concluded with the warning: "Above all things exact from them (C.L.U. delegates) that they shall take no part in politics, except by order of their organization when the latter shall deem it right and proper to take part as a body in a bona fide political movement of labor, having in view the emancipation of the wage working class."⁷

In the preamble to the constitution of the Central Labor Federation we find this clause.

Resolved, That every union affiliating with this Central Labor Federation of New York declares that it is opposed to the existing political parties of the capitalists, and favors independent political action⁸ by organized labor.

That sounds very S.T. & L.A. like.

Heading for a National Organization

Closely following the formation of the C.L.F. in New York City, similar bodies were started with large followings in Brooklyn and in Hudson County, N.J. These three formed a general executive board and became known as the

⁷ See "Withdraw From the CLU," in *Workman's Advocate*. July 12, 1890.

⁸ The term "independent political action" must be interpreted in accordance with the sense and spirit of the time. It did not mean to put up so-called union tickets, nor organize "Union Labor Parties," for these do not aim at the abolition of capitalism. "Independent political action," as used by the C.L.F. and by the New Trade Unionists, meant distinctly and definitely to aim at the emancipation of labor from wage-slavery, as indeed had been stated by the C.L.F. Note but its call to C.L.U. unions, previously quoted.

United Central Labor Federations. A reference to this executive board, made in the minutes of the N.Y. C.L.F. meeting of June 14, 1891, shows the close connection which existed between the federation and the Socialist Labor Party. The reference is as follows:

The General Executive submitted a draft of by-laws for the regulation of the united federations. It covers the matters of representation, of the constituent units, of moral and financial aid in economic conflicts with capital, and participation in political action with the Socialist Labor Party . . . and finally, providing for the expulsion of central organizations who endorse the candidates of any party not a bona fide labor party, or which allows any of its constituents to do so.⁹

As can be seen from the various passages which have been quoted, foundations of a new trade union, markedly different in methods and aims from the old style, were carefully and deliberately being laid. From that time forward, things shaped themselves ever more favorably for the extension of the New Trade Unionism. A ceaseless, vigorous, sparkling and inspiring agitation for the new principles was carried on by the C.L.F. unions and the Socialist Labor Party. This agitation was reflected in the S.L.P.'s press, *The People*, which, issue upon issue, published masterly articles and reports on the weaknesses, the inefficiency, and the hopelessness of trade union action only, and on the inestimable power of combining political action with economic effort.

Nor was this agitation without its fruit. Within two years such a widespread sentiment for the new movement had sprung up that the Central Labor Federation of New York demanded the formation of a national union of all central bodies throughout the country.¹⁰ The transactions of the General Executive Board of the United C.L.F.'s reveal conclusively this general desire. In one of its reports this passage occurs:

As a number of central bodies in the country had inquired as to charters to be issued by the board, the secretary was instructed to draft a form. As the business of the board had increased considerably, it was decided to hold meetings every two weeks.¹¹

⁹ C.L.F. Report in *The People*, June 14, 1891.

¹⁰ C.L.F. Report in *The People*, May 7, 1893.

¹¹ C.L.F. Report in *The People*, May 28, 1893.

Subsequently 200 charters for central bodies were printed by the G.E.B.¹²

Among the inquiries which were received as to information with regard to organizing on C.L.F. lines were requests from Los Angeles;¹³ Pittsburgh;¹⁴ and Cincinnati.¹⁵ From other points reports were received of the ripeness for C.L.F. bodies. Such places were New Haven, Conn.;¹⁶ Philadelphia; and in Wisconsin;¹⁷ Omaha;¹⁸ Monroe County, N.Y.;¹⁹ Hocking Valley, Ohio;²⁰ Trenton, N.J., and Boston;²¹ New Hampshire.²² Clearly, the currents of the labor union movement were moving socialismward.

Boring From Within and Results

It must not be thought that it was to the C.L.F. organizations and to those others above mentioned that the demand for New Trade Unionism was confined. The socialists in all trade unions, in the American Federation of Labor as well as in the Knights of Labor, were veritably moving heaven and earth to line up those organizations for classconscious political action. They succeeded to the extent of “forcing the horse to the water, but not making him drink.” Their advance was carried so far in the A.F. of L. that at its Chicago convention, 1893, a plank, “Plank 10,” was introduced, which was regarded as a practical declaration for socialism. The socialist delegates were able to force the submission of that plank to a referendum vote, and despite the desperate tactics of Gompers and his pals, the general vote declared in favor of the clause. All that remained was for the following year’s, 1894, convention, to stick it into the constitution, but instead of so sticking it, the fakers in the convention, by a series of manipulations, threw it out. That was the high water mark of the socialists’ “boring from within” the A.F. of L. This policy had reached its climax and demonstrated that it wouldn’t work. But

¹² C.L.F. Report in *The People*, June 25, 1893.

¹³ C.L.F. Report in *The People*, April 23, 1893.

¹⁴ C.L.F. Report in *The People*, May 14, 1893.

¹⁵ C.L.F. Report in *The People*, May 28, 1893.

¹⁶ C.L.F. Report in *The People*, June 4, 1893.

¹⁷ *The People*, page 1, June 18, 1893.

¹⁸ “See article, “Good for Omaha!” in *The People*, July 2, 1893.

¹⁹ Report of N.Y. State Convention in *The People*, July 14, 1895.

²⁰ C.L.F. Report in *The People*, Sept. 29, 1895.

²¹ C.L.F. Report in *The People*, Oct. 6, 1895.

²² C.L.F. Report in *The People*, Dec. 8, 1895.

this occurrence gave the New Trade Unionists an additional argument against the dishonesty and corruption of the pure and simple leaders, and helped future developments.

In the Knights of Labor the socialist elements fared no better. They were able to force things up to a certain point, and then the corrupt leaders resorted to all the trickery and treachery that desperadoes are capable of. The socialists were cheated out of their rights, and there remained nothing else for them to do but renounce the organization. That was done.

The story of the socialists' advance in the Knights is briefly this: Powderly's downfall as grand master workman was accomplished under socialist leadership at the Philadelphia Assembly in 1893. At about the same time the socialist elements secured control of District Assembly 49, New York, the most powerful central body of the Knights. James R. Sovereign took Powderly's place as grand master. A change for the better was hoped for, but Sovereign soon blasted these expectations. He started filling the official journal of the Knights with free silver and Populistic doctrine. When the 1894 convention of the Knights occurred (New Orleans), Sovereign sought re-election. The Powderly henchmen were also on hand. Between these two wings stood the socialist delegation, eight in all.²³ In order to prevent the Powderlyites from regaining control, and at the same time to end the dissemination of the harmful Populistic teaching among the Knights, an agreement was made between Sovereign and the general officers on one side and the socialist delegation on the other, whereby, in return for the support of Sovereign, the District Assembly 49 delegation (New York) were to choose the editor of the journal. When, however, the time for the appointment of D.A. 49's choice arrived, Sovereign said the order was too poor to pay the \$30 per week for editorial service. He was told that the nominee would accept \$7 per week until the full amount could be paid. That ended the matter for the time. But shortly upon that H.B. Martin, of the General Executive Board, was given the place and paid \$24 per week. This was dishonesty No. 1.

Worse followed. With Martin's accession to {the} editorship, a series of political speculations with the Maryland Gorman Democrats²⁴ ensured

²³ The eight socialists were as follows: From D.A. 49, Wm. L. Brower, Patrick Murphy, Michael Kelly and Daniel De Leon; from Montreal, R.J. Kerrigan; from St. Louis, J.J. Reifgraber; and two from the Brewers N.T.A., Aug. Priesterbach and Ch. Bechtold. See "Report of Daniel De Leon," in *The People*, Dec. 1, 1895.

²⁴ Arthur Pue Gorman (1839–1906) was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1880 after 12 years in the Maryland legislature. As head of the Democratic Committee, he directed Grover

{ensued}. A special Democratic campaign sheet, *The Critic*, was published by the general headquarters of the Knights, and was filled with articles which had been written and appeared in the Knights' journal and which had to be written in such a strain that they could be used for Democratic campaign purposes. The general office received Democratic money for this prostitution. The headquarters were further used to boost gas company stocks, and the labor movement {was} held in slight regard.²⁵ The whole course of the men in charge was rascalous; it was "make hay while the sun shines," after them oblivion.

The general assembly of 1895 loomed up. The crooks had felt comparatively secure until they learnt that New York was to send a large delegation, six, and probably seven: they had expected only one or two. Then alarm seized them and outrages were forthwith planned to destroy New York's representation at the convention. The mode of procedure was significant. *The fakers made their attack on Local Assembly 1563—from which Daniel De Leon hailed; they therein revealed where their fear lay: it lay in De Leon.* L.A. 1563 had to be suspended, by hook or crook, and crookedly was it done. First a silly charge was trumped up: the charge was met and shattered. Next the grossest unconstitutionality was resorted to and the local unlawfully deprived of its charter. Sovereign was appealed to and decided the G.E.B. had acted wrongfully, yet he refused to reverse the decision, and also refused to reorganize the local. De Leon went to the General Assembly at Washington, and, after a hot fight conducted by the socialist delegates, was admitted pending the trial of L.A. 1563. The trial of the local lasted two days, during which time all the charges above alluded to and much more, were proven.²⁶ But the leaders had control of a bare majority; they had packed the convention to such an extent that a delegate, O'Brien of Boston, was led to exclaim: "There are delegates here with strings tied to their legs so tight that they walk lame." Under such circumstances no kind of argument availed. It is therefore no surprise to learn that the convention decided against L.A. 1563; but the vote was close, 21 to 23.²⁷

Cleveland's successful presidential campaign in 1884.—*R.B.*

²⁵ See "Report of Daniel De Leon in *The People*, Dec. 1, 1895.

²⁶ For full details see "Report of Daniel De Leon" above mentioned. This report is an invaluable document, exposing in full the reeking corruption of a conscienceless band. It should be read by all who would understand the nature of the labor faker.

²⁷ There is a lesson in these facts which should not be lost. The S.P. organs with their fondness of urging the policy of confining one's effort to boring from within the A.F. of L.

When De Leon returned from Washington he presented a long report detailing the corruption in the order and the outrages practiced against his local, and called upon the Knights to repudiate the order. The delegates of D.A. 49, upon their return, confirmed the report of De Leon, and the district at once took steps to renounce the Knights.

Things now moved rapidly. The General Assembly of the Knights had just adjourned, November 1895; the report of the delegation of D.A. 49 was considered by the district at a meeting held December 1, 1895; and on December 6, a committee of the district met with the General Executive Board of the Central Labor Federation and constituted the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance.

Situation Demanded the Alliance

We are now in a position to form a composite picture of the events that led up to the formation of the S.T. & L.A. Boring from within the American Federation of Labor—boring with a purpose, of course—had been pushed to the utmost, but had failed because of foul treachery. Fakerism was not to be “borrowed.” The same was true with regard to the Knights of Labor. The crooks showed that they never would surrender to the socialists, thus emphasizing their role as labor lieutenants of the capitalist class. On the C.L.F. side we see a growing movement for a classconscious union, for the union based on a correct conception of the nature of the class struggle. Add to these three currents the suffering caused by the hard times of the 1890s, and the consequent increased impotency of pure and simpledom; consider the failure of the large Homestead and Pullman strikes, consider further the fact that in 1893, the numerically large American Railway Union had called for a reorganization on more modern lines, and we must conclude that all signs pointed to one course as the only remedy: *Organize a nationwide socialist trade union movement.* This was accordingly done. The Socialist Trade and

unions to make socialists out of them often argue that though the leaders are corrupt, it is not them whom it is sought to convert but rather the rank and file. At best, this is a specious argument. The labor fakers will never permit themselves to be bested; they will disrupt and start rival unions if the socialists should anywhere get control. The history of the S.T. & L.A. proves this, and also that of the I.W.W. To cite only one instance in proof, the Schenectady strike of the I.W.W. in 1906 demonstrated that while the A.F. of L. molders were sympathetic with the strikers, the labor lieutenants turned up and threatened a rival molders union if their union cast its lot with the I.W.W. Their threat had its effect.

Labor Alliance gave new inspiration for socialists to carry on the work of the labor movement, and it was joyously hailed by all of a revolutionary spirit.

It must be apparent, from all the foregoing account, that the S.T. & L.A. was not “a scheme hatched out in the brain” of some one mind; that it did not “come down upon us full-fledged from top to bottom as the masterpiece of our ‘Master Workman’”; but that it really was the product of what had gone before.

So much for the reliability of Mr. N.I. Stone on that head.

But this gentleman is guilty of worse unreliability. In his pamphlet, page 6, 7—already referred to—he attempts to show that no member of the party knew a thing of the contemplated launching of a new organization. Says he: “Until a brief editorial note appeared in *The People*, Dec. 15, 1895, informing the world of the newborn babe, not a hint was made in that paper that could give the least inkling of what was about to transpire.”

This statement is false, utterly false. *The People* did notify the party membership of events as fast as they occurred. *The People* of Dec. 8, 1895, page 3, reporting the Central Labor Federation meeting, contained the following:

A very interesting debate then ensued relative to “New Trades Unionism.” . . . It appeared to be pretty certain that in the very near future a gigantic movement would be set on foot in the United States, which would result in organizing a truly progressive and solid centralized body, *both against the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor.*

The same issue of *The People*, Dec. 8, 1895, reported the meeting of D.A. 49, held December 1. In the report occurred these paragraphs:

With a deep sense of outraged manhood and of plain duty to the labor cause, we therefore repudiate the aforesaid General Assembly and the buccaneers who impudently style themselves the general officers of the Knights of Labor.

Furthermore, trusting that in the light of this and many another similar experience the wage working class of this continent will at last perceive the contrast afforded by the growing impotency of American labor under the lead of “pure and simple” fakers on the one hand, and the grand achievements of European labor under the banner of international socialism on the other hand, we hereby call upon all K. of L. Assemblies and all progressive organizations to join with us in establishing a national body on the only natural lines of the labor

movement, the lines plainly marked out by the class struggle, in a word, the lines of international socialism.

A committee of three is hereby appointed to immediately carry out the present resolution.

This was adopted by more than a 2 to 3 majority.

Thus it can be seen that *The People* regularly contained announcements of the decisive steps about to be taken.

The flim-flam presentation of the situation by Stone should not escape attention. When he seeks to convey the impression that it was only through the columns of *The People* that information concerning the plans under consideration could be gained, he is misleading his audience. The tenor of the reports just cited reflects a powerful stir among the C.L.F. and D.A. 49 circles of those days. No one can imagine but that events such as were taking place were on everyone's lips; that everything and everybody was expectation, and that the movement was but awaiting the appearance of that truly progressive body to take the place of the Knights and the A.F. of L. Such news traveled faster than they could be recorded in the paper, since in the nature of things, *The People* always was published a week after transactions took place. In spite of this, however, the files of *The People* refute Mr. Stone's charges, as has been shown.

One point more and we shall dismiss this "historian." In his pamphlet Stone tries to bolster up his contention that "no one knew," by publishing two letters, one from J.F. Tobin, the other from J.M. Barnes, both of whom spoke at the Cooper Union meeting launching the Alliance. In their letters these men claim they had no knowledge that an Alliance was ever contemplated. Reports in *The People* show a different tale. The Cooper Union meeting was held December 14. *The People* shows that "*Barnes was present at a meeting of the C.L.F. on December 8, when a report was rendered that the General Executive Board had decided to adopt the following name for the new progressive international union: 'Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance of the United States and Canada.'*" See *The People*, Dec. 15, 1895, page 4.

So much for Mr. Stone and his story. It is all buncombe.

Hillquit's 'Surprise'

Let us now turn our attention to the other "historian," Mr. Hillquit. As previously stated, Hillquit in his *History*, page 323. alleges that the S.T. &

L.A. was sprung as a surprise upon the Socialist Labor Party National Convention of 1896. If such a charge has any meaning at all, it means that the delegates were unprepared for the submittal of and action upon the matter of the S.T. & L.A.; that they never, in fact, expected such a matter to come up, and consequently when it was presented they were taken unawares, by “surprise.” Hillquit’s charge is easily disposed of.

The columns of *The People* from December 1895 up to the time of holding the national convention of the S.L.P., July 4, 1896—and after, also—show the greatest activity on the part of party organizations for the Alliance. Besides special articles showing the progress of the new union, the reports of the General Executive Board revealed a tremendous activity in many centers for the Alliance. Organizers, mostly S.L.P. men credentialed by the G.E.B., rendered glowing accounts of the enthusiastic reception accorded the Alliance. Thus we may scan reports from Philadelphia²⁸; Chicago²⁹; New Haven, Conn.³⁰; Cincinnati³¹; Cleveland³²; Davenport, Iowa; Pittsburgh; Milwaukee³³; Montreal.³⁴ These are only some of the numerous places from which information was received of the S.L.P. men’s Alliance activity. In the face of such overwhelming support it might have been surmised that the party’s convention, as a matter of course, would take some kind of action on the Alliance.

But there were other signs, more significant, which foreshadowed what was to come. The national convention of the party did not occur until July 4, 1896. Preceding this date, section upon section, state organization following state organization, adopted ringing resolutions endorsing the Alliance, and commending it to the working class. We learn in *The People*, March 22, 1896, that Section New Haven, Conn., officially recognized the Alliance; that the California S.L.P. State Convention, Feb. 23, 1896 (see *The People*, March 8, 1896), gave its endorsement; and so did the Massachusetts S.L.P. State Convention, May 17, 1896 (see *The People*, May 24, 1896); the Pennsylvania S.L.P. State Convention, May 31, 1896 (*The People*, June 7, 1896), the Ohio

²⁸ See “Parliaments of Labor,” in *The People*, page 4, April 5, 1896.

²⁹ “A Call,” in *The People*, page 1, April 12, 1896.

³⁰ “A Debate,” in *The People*, page 2, April 19, 1896.

³¹ “Cincinnati,” in *The People*, page 3, April 19, 1896.

³² “A Three Act Play,” in *The People*, page 1, April 26, 1896.

³³ *The People*, page 2, April 26, 1896.

³⁴ “Parliaments of Labor,” in *The People*, page 4, May 3, 1896.

S.L.P. State Convention, May 30, 1896 (*The People*, page 3, June 14, 1896); the Illinois S.L.P. State Convention (*The People*, page 4, June 14, 1896). In the face of all these favorable endorsements by large units of the party, Hillquit, the “historian,” has the brass to claim that the Alliance was sprung as a “surprise” upon the 1896 national convention!

But this is not all. The records show that Section New York, at a meeting held June 20, 1896, to consider instructions for delegates to the party national convention passed, among other instructions, the following:

“3. To move in the convention that the convention endorse the S.T. & L.A.” See *The People*, page 3, June 28, 1896.

Thus we see that it was from the very section, of which this man was then a member, that explicit instructions were issued making it imperative for its delegates to bring up the S.T. & L.A. Still, our “historian” tells his readers of the “surprise” sprung at the convention. This “surprise” gag is but a myth to be doled out to innocents.

Conclusion

As may be clearly seen, the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance was not started as an experiment, nor was it the product of one man’s or more men’s fancy. On the contrary, it was the product called forth by the conditions of the time, and structurally it followed what was found workable in earlier organizations. Thus, the Knights of Labor, organically, was composed of mixed assemblies, district assemblies, and national assemblies; the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance was composed of mixed alliances, local alliances, district alliances and national alliances. The central labor federations, as has been seen, urged combined economic and political action, and further, they supported the Socialist Labor Party; the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance likewise declared for that position. We have seen that as early as 1890, the Central Labor Union, through the insistence of the socialist members, adopted a clause whereby delegates were forbidden to allow their names to be used as assets by the old political parties; the S.T. & L.A inserted these clauses in its constitution:

Any affiliated organization, or any officer thereof, that may endorse or in any way support any candidate of any political party, other than the Socialist Labor Party, shall be expelled by the General Executive Board.

Any member of the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance who accepts

nomination for office from any political party, shall be immediately dropped from the roll of membership.

In all essentials, the Alliance was built upon the progressive measures which had preceded it. For men to come out and claim that the matter of launching the Alliance was otherwise, is to lay themselves open to a total dismissal of confidence in them.

What additional charges have been brought against the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance, such as alleging it to have been a “union wrecker,” have as little foundation in fact as it has been shown the first cited charges. Utterly untruthful have the S.P. authoritarians been in their accusations against both S.T. & L.A. and S.L.P. Wherever there exists an organization which needs to resort to lies to support its position, as the Socialist Party does, there exists an organization which cannot endure, an organization whose downfall is but a matter of time, an organization destined to bring failure to its followers.

In order that a triumphant socialist movement may set up its advancing columns, it is hoped that the hosts who line up with the socialist movement refuse to act on one-sided information; that they refuse to be scared by any kind of tale; and that they insist in finding out the other side of the story.

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