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FIRST EDITORIAL

A “LABOR” PARTY

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THE woods are full of rumors and of resolutions long as tape-worms favoring a “Labor” party.

It is timely at such seasons to consider what a “Labor” party may or may not mean; what it may or may not accomplish.

If a party of “Labor” is set up upon the identical economic principles of the pure and simple trade union, it will not differ materially from any middle class party, and, just the same as all middle class parties are bound to go down, and for the same reason that the non-political pure and simple trade union could not stand, such a “Labor” party, even if it were at all a possibility, would founder as soon as launched.

The reason why a middle class party cannot stand is that it admits the basic principles upon which its adversary stands but denies the logical conclusions the adversary draws. Take the farmer’s or populist party, for instance: It is up in arms against Monopoly, as it calls concentrated private capital, but it not only does not strive to abolish, on the contrary, it strives to perpetuate the private ownership of capital from which monopoly inevitably springs; it objects to the ultimate effects of private ownership in the means of production, but it strives to uphold the system of private ownership and approves of its immediate effects. A movement or party thus poised will be caught in endless contradictions, will find itself so entangled in its own meshes that it will stumble and finally fall to pieces.

The reasons why the pure and simple trade union can not hold out are similar. The pure and simple trade union, any more than a middle class party, does not realize that the existing system is at fault and must be revolutionized. Like middle

class parties, pure and simple trade unions strive to establish a manner of living within the frame work of capitalism itself. Now, then, capitalism eats up the ground from under the pure and simple union; it displaces men and throws them into idleness; it eliminates skill from labor; and by all these things renders it impossible for the union to hold together or absorb a sufficient number of workers to do its work. The pure and simple union grants the principle of private ownership in the means of production; it grants the right of the possessors of these means to keep their profits; it talks about fair and legitimate profits; and it is satisfied with wages. In other words, it has no inkling of the fact that all wealth comes from Labor; that wages is only a part of the workman's own product; that all "profit" pocketed by the capitalist is illegitimate and a theft; that the capital in the possession of the capitalist is accumulated profits, or thefts from the workers; that the system under which wages and profits exist is one that tends to increase the latter and reduce the former; and that by the very law of its existence, so long as it exists, the permanence of the pure and simple union is rendered impossible. An uninterrupted line of experience has recently demonstrated the utter incapacity of the pure and simple trade union to carry out its programme. If then, the non-political pure and simple trade union and the middle class parties are marked Ichabod, a combination that should join the two fatal features of the middle class party and of the pure and simple trade union is not simply marked, but tattooed all over with "Ichabod."

Political parties{,} whatever their denominations, are reflexes of economic interests. No political party can exist without unity of economic interests. For this reason, there are at this stage of the social evolution only two sets of parties possible: the party of the capitalist and the party of the proletariat. The party of the capitalists—i.e., of the monopolists—is now forming out of the monopolistic interests in the Democratic and Republican parties; the only party that can face such a political combination with prospects of success is the party of the proletariat, i.e., of the class that is bereft of the means whereby to live and that has the requisite vigor of character to refuse to live under conditions of vassalage to others. Such a party can not have the economic platform of the "pure and simple" trades and unions, it is bound to demand the full return of the labor of the workers, in other words, it cannot escape demanding the collective ownership of all the means

of production, i.e., the Socialist or Co-operative Commonwealth. And finally such a party would be too clear-headed to imagine it could conceal its Socialism by giving itself a colorless name, and it would be too self-respecting to indulge in the devices of cowards. Here, as else where, the future party of Labor that will not flicker upward and die, but that will burn with steady, increasing glow until it has lighted the people's feet to victory, will be and can be none other than the Socialist Labor Party—the American wing of the world's Social Democracy.

Many a curious yahoo, discredited riff-raff, flotsam and jetsam of the American Labor Movement, who with empty head and corrupt breast has been sponging a living out of his fellows, who at heart feels that the Movement of Labor is after all too big a thing for his pigmy mind to grasp, and who feels the strong undertow of Socialism and fears for his little crumbs and little jobs, is now anxiously booming the thought of a "Labor" party "that shall not be Socialistic."

But the Socialist Movement of Labor will proceed serenely, taking as little notice of these flies in the air, as the steam-engine that does not even know of, or hear, the crunching under its wheels of the bones of the fools who thought to impede or stop its course.

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