

The People.

VOL. VII, NO. 15

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, JULY 11, 1897

PRICE 3 CENTS

EDITORIAL

Disillusioned.

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One of the manifestations of the labor movement in Australia was the creation of a "Political Labor League." This body denoted at the time of its organization a decided improvement in the understanding of the Social or Labor Question. Trades unions, built upon the "pure and simple" plan, together with other "reform forces," had been found deficient: they had long been nibbling at the question, but never got any further, and, realizing that, in all such matters, he who does not progress does not stand still but slides back, the Australian unions and other bona fide reform agencies felt they were losing ground. It was to a clear understanding of this fact that the "Political Labor League" owed its birth. With greater honesty than our own American "pure and simple" fakirs, who had begun to make a business of labor defeats, and with greater virility than the British "pure and simple" leaders, whose minds have become ossified, our Australian brothers decided to set up a political organization which should supplement the economic, and thus grab the capitalist bull by both horns.

This step denoted progress, and yet it was progress only in a very general way, it was not that complete progress that removes failure and insures success. It was progress in the sense that it showed the Australians knew failure when they saw it, did not nail themselves to a false theory, and were ready to abandon it for a better. The progress was incomplete, however, inasmuch as the programme set up by the "Political Labor League" proceeded from the false notion that Capitalism could be tinkered, that the ship of the modern Social system could be reformed by knocking out one plank and setting in another, by removing one beam and substituting it with a better; it proceeded from the false notion that "something could be got now," and so holding it abstained from striving for the whole. The structural defect of the "Political Labor League" can be summed up this wise: "It did not yet appreciate the fact that the Social Question involves a revolution." Accordingly, the P.L.L. strove for little things—large enough if the measure of good that they could accomplish were considered—yet little, infinitely small, when compared with the main issue. It is the fate of such

relatively small issues that they can not be enacted, or, if enacted, enforced. The Australians, while working on the right line of political action, were working with the wrong tool—the “Small issue tool.” It is in connection with the experience herein made that our Australian brothers deserve special credit.

Not only are “small issues” in the labor movement destined to failure, but they have another and worse feature, they look attractive by the very reason of their smallness, they thereby deceive the masses with the prospect of success, and thereby, like so many “ignes fatul,” lure them away from the right path and drag them down into impassable quagmire. The small issues which the P.L.L. set up involved the Australian workers into years upon years of fruitless efforts. We see with pleasure that they are manifesting the requisite physical and intellectual vigor to recognize their error, to call a halt upon the tactics that involve nothing short of the failure and demoralization that accompany spook-chasing, and the slogan: “Nothing less than Socialism in our time!” now begins to be heard in the camp of the P.L.L.

This manifestation speaks volumes: it shows that the illusions accompanying the first steps of the labor movement are overcome in Australia; it shows that our brothers there have at least discovered the nature of the present issue, have seized its pulse, felt its revolutionary stroke, and fired by it, are determining to strike the only road that is practical, because it is the only road that is not visionary.

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

Uploaded September 2003