

The People.

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POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC

THE “NEW YORKER VOLKSZEITUNG.” {2}

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In a squib, in which allusion is made to the political debate at the recent convention of the A.F. of L., the *New Yorker Volkszeitung* of the 19th of last month had this to say:

Does it not now dawn upon certain of our own comrades that their own favorite, frequently untactful form of attack against the non-Socialist trades union movement, and, in connection therewith, their own separate trades union tactics, has placed in the hands of the corrupt foes of Socialism in the convention at Kansas City the very weapons that could not fail of effect upon the indifferent element present, and that thereby helped to retard the flow of the Socialist current?

What were those “tactless forms” of attack, those “weapons placed in the hands of the foes of Socialism” by “certain of our comrades”? The paper gives no hint. Indeed, to sustain its position against the party tactics, the *Volkszeitung* would have to throw itself upon the preposterous charges that flowed out of Gompers’ impure mouth, and that the capitalist press, as a matter of course, endorsed by giving them circulation to against Socialism itself. That, however, would be treason. Whatever else the paper is guilty of to the injury of the Labor Movement, as we have shown, and shall show again, it is not guilty of intentional treason. Has it any facts to base ITS anti-party policy opinion on? None that will hold water. And yet, in a sense exactly the opposite of its own, there IS truth in the charge that the foes of Socialism at the convention had been given weapons in hand by certain of our comrades.

The political debate cast its shadow before it. In expectation of it, P.J. McGuire was anxiously looked for. Some matters were even delayed until his arrival. Indeed, McGuire was to be the chief Socialist-killer of the occasion. He sailed in; he chased the party up hill and down vale; he larumed it to his heart’s content, but his chief point was the unsteadiness and vacillation of “reform movements” (among which he ranked the party) and—, according to the *Volkszeitung*’s report itself of December 17, he carried his denunciations no further than down to 1888. There he stopped short.

McGuire was by far the shrewdest of all the assembled fakirs on the occasion. They, each of whom carried the Mark of Caine across his brow, left there by the party since it dropped its old unsteady gait,—they might be foolish enough to point their finger to their sores and put their head where it was sure to be hit again. Not so McGuire. He did not care to call attention to the purple cane marks he carries, by venturing upon a discussion of modern occurrences. He chose safer field; perfectly safe field; he picked up his weapons from among these furnished before and down to 1888, in other words, furnished by the party in its salad days; in the days of its greenness on the Movement in America; in the days of its weakness, its unsteadiness, its proneness to see possible Socialists where there were only dupers, as exemplified by its being roped in by the Greenback movement; in the days of its gullibleness, when the fakirs could and did impose upon it; in the days when, of unsteady and vacillating step, it could be ranked with "reforms," was easily "absorbed," and, not yet trusting itself, sought to lean on anything that came along, fearing ever separate, free and independent existence; in short, he picked the weapons relegated to the past since '90, and, finally, solemnly thrown aside for ever as stupid and poltroonish in '96!—Such were the weapons he used against Socialism, and it never will "dawn upon the party" again to furnish him with the like.

It is not THE PEOPLE'S purpose to toss the *Volkszeitung* in a blanket, or to set it scooting, looking for pretences to excuse its inability to defend rash views that facts reject and escape justifying its shy-cock criticisms of the party's tactics. Such game would not be worth the candle. In returning this week to the subject, already broached last week, and in reserving freedom to take up the matter again, if necessary, the purpose is higher.

In the first place, the past history of the party can not be too frequently rehearsed; it is instructive at every turn, all the more in sight of the large numbers of recruits that are joining the party and whose future conduct must be steadied by the light of the experience of the past.

In the second place, an earnest note of protest,—as loud as utterable, as emphatic as markable—, is due at this season against that flippant spirit that will recklessly slapdash opinions as the maggot bites it on matters of weight in a movement of the most serious character; against that cringing policy that can only embolden the foe, that makes not one new friend, and that renders lukewarm the friends already gained; against that foolishly personal notion whose favorite style is to set up its own whims against the average and collective wisdom of the party,—and thus "retard the flow of the Socialist current."

Of these sins, serious and harmful, the *Volkszeitung* is guilty. To call attention to

them is no less painful to us than to it; but THE PEOPLE was not born for fair weather and parade; moreover, it never mistook itself for an END; it is a MEANS—a means to hew a path clear across the thick underbrush and rubbish that has settled on the Labor Movement in America, thanks to just the old party-tactics that some are still coquetting with, and that none more than the party's foes would wish to see re-introduced. In doing this disagreeable though needful work, thorns may prick; it is their way; but the work of the woodsman survives while the thorns are cast into the fire.

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