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EDITORIAL

A MATTER OF HISTORY.

By DANIEL DE LEON

A FEW minutes before delivering his address at the Yorkville Casino on December 18, William D. Haywood, being asked by a reporter for the *Daily People* whether his speaking under the auspices of the Chicago I.W.W. meant an endorsement by him of that body's striking the political clause out of the Industrial Workers preamble, made, as reported last week in these columns, the following answer:

“I am still a Socialist, and believe in political action. I was not in favor of striking out the political clause from the preamble, but perhaps it was the best that could have been done under the conditions. The organization was being torn apart by the efforts of both Socialist parties to get its endorsement for themselves.”

The opinion herein expressed is an opinion heard not infrequently, yet it is unsupported by the historic facts.

As to the Socialist party, there is no evidence of its ever having lusted after an I.W.W. endorsement. Far otherwise, and to the contrary. From the moment the I.W.W. was founded, the only sentiment entertained for it, and expressed by the S.P., was one of unqualified hostility. Loyal to the S.P.'s A.F. of L. connections, one may even say obedient to their financial dependence upon the A.F. of L., the S.P. officials and press assailed the new body with a rancor and a “reasoning” that recalled the A.F. of L. “reasoning” and rancor against the Socialist Trade & Labor Alliance—unable to meet I.W.W. arguments, “Scab!” and “De Leonism!” was yelled at the I.W.W., just as in S.T. & L.A. days. This went so far that even Debs, whose policy is friendship for all, felt constrained to come out with a caustic letter against some of his fellow party men who led in the assault. So far from having sought I.W.W. endorsement, the S.P.'s only policy in the premises was to seek to cave in the

head of the I.W.W.

As to the Socialist Labor Party—whose economic, sociologic, and tactical principles the I.W.W. expressed, and on the part of which, accordingly, a desire would seem natural to be endorsed by the I.W.W.—as to the S.L.P., its rigidly followed policy was that of avoiding, even preventing I.W.W. endorsement, or anything that looked like an identification of the two bodies. The reason for the policy was obvious.

The existence in the field of two rival parties of Socialism revealed divergent principles on the question of economic organizations. Socialist unity is impossible without unity on correct principles touching that fundamental question. The I.W.W., soundly planted as an economic organization, offered the ground upon which the two parties could unite. Under such conditions, it was imperative for the I.W.W. to remain neutral and give time for the S.P. to be weaned from its false position on Unionism. Endorsement of the S.L.P. by the I.W.W. would, under such conditions, retard rather than promote the solidification of the revolutionary forces of the land. Planted upon these reasons, and aware that petty spirits would but too readily take hold of even the slightest pretext to arouse hostility by claiming that the “S.L.P. bossed the I.W.W.” (the cry that Marxism is familiar with from its foes of all varieties), the S.L.P. scrupulously abstained not merely from obtaining, but even from endeavoring to obtain, or seeming to enjoy I.W.W. endorsement. So scrupulous was the S.L.P. in the observance of this wise policy that its national Editor, in whom its foes of all varieties have, however unintentionally, done the honor of incarnating the S.L.P., he having been nominated for the editorship of the then I.W.W. organ, declined in a letter published both in the said organ and in *The People*. And it was he who, at the second convention of the I.W.W. moved the constitutional clause instructing the Executive Board to employ no organizer who was an organizer for any political party. The historic facts show that, although for a reason exactly the opposite of that of the S.P., neither did the S.L.P. make any effort to get the I.W.W. endorsement for itself.

Obviously, seeing that neither of the two Socialist parties was competing for the endorsement of the I.W.W., the striking of the political clause from the Chicago I.W.W. platform must be accounted for by some reason other than that alleged

competition. What was that reason?

If the historic facts are conclusive denying rivalry by the two parties of Socialism for the endorsement of the I.W.W., more conclusive still is the historically authenticated sequence of events demonstrating the “conditions” under which the political clause was stricken out of the Chicago I.W.W. preamble.

Already at the second I.W.W. convention (1906) the political clause was assailed. The leading assailant was the Chicago delegate Moore, at the time an Anarchist. (See stenographic report Convention of 1906.)¹ The second assault came at the very next year’s convention. It also proceeded from two avowed Anarchists—the Italian Camanita and the Scandinavian Axelson. (See stenographic report, Convention of 1907.) The third assault followed at the fourth convention (1908—again led by an Anarchist, the same Axelson of the previous year, and was supported by explicitly Anarchist argument. The “new preamble,” with the political clause struck out, was reported by him. Speaking in favor of his proposition to cut out the political clause, he said: “Tear out the little hook in the preamble ‘you must unite on the political field.’ We are accused of cowardice that we are afraid to cut out that . . . show me where political action has accrued to the benefit of the working class”; and similar Anarchist language was held by others, by Cole, a G.E.B. member, among others, who said he “could not see whether political action had brought any benefit to the workers.” (See minutes of the sixth day’s session, issued at the convention with Trautmann’s signature attached, and *Industrial Bulletin* dated November 7, 1908.) Such were the conditions under which the political clause was taken from that preamble. It was not an act of despair, committed by a maiden in distress to escape the importunities of two hostile rivals. It was a deliberate step, taken from free choice, long striven after, and carried out at the earliest opportunity, proclaiming “Physical Force ONLY,” “Direct Action ONLY”—in short, Anarchy. Nor did the acts of the Chicago I.W.W., since then, leave any doubt, if doubt there could be, on the matter. On the contrary. Its adoptive national organ, the Spokane *Industrial Worker*, has with admirable frankness proclaimed its organization’s views with recommendations to “strike at the ballot box with an axe” and pictures to match.

¹ [Proceedings of Second IWW Convention.]

Weakened by the defection of the Western Federation of Miners, the reactionary elements within which availed themselves of the opportunity offered by the absence of Haywood, then in an Idaho prison, to scuttle the I.W.W.; harassed and hounded by the A.F. of L. and its ally the S.P. press; furthermore reduced to a minimum by the financial crisis that then paralyzed industry; the I.W.W. fell an easy prey to a small bunch of Anarchists—the legitimate heirs to all ruins.

These are the facts. History can be ignored with impunity by none, least of all at this formative and critical period of the Socialist and Labor Movement of the land.

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