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EDITORIAL

PARTIAL TRUTH—ROBUSTEST FALSEHOOD.

By DANIEL DE LEON

ON his way to the convention of the A.F. of L., Mr. John Mitchell allowed himself to be interviewed by the Philadelphia *Ledger*. The paper reports the gentleman to have said:

“Labor Unions must be kept apart from politics, since just as soon as they become political machines they must die.”

This statement is true, but only partially so. Being but a partial truth, it is a robust falsehood.

It is true that just as soon, at any rate, soon after the Unions represented by the Mitchells would become political, besides economic machines, they would die. Right here, however, the question springs up, What is the purpose of the Union? It is on the answer to this question that the Labor Movement divides in twain: it is only on the correct answer to the question that the Labor Movement can be re-solidified.

Is it the purpose of the Trades Union merely to resist capitalist encroachment? Is it its purpose to act merely as a brake on the downward slide of the working class? If that is a Trades Union's purpose, then, indeed, its aim must be to keep alive that which it resists. Unquestionably, Iago's occupation would be gone, the Union must die, and quickly too, if it were to adopt a manoeuvre—and the joining of politics to economics is such—by which the quietus would be promptly put upon the thing resisted. So long as the capitalist system is in force, there will be capitalist outrages to resent and resist by Labor. Capitalism implies the sentence pronounced upon Labor that it is an article of merchandise. Along with the sentence goes the degradation of the workingman. It happens, however, that the merchandise “workingman” differs from the merchandise “pork-chop” in that the former is a

living human being, the latter not. Hence the iniquities of a lowering price and bad treatment, which, when placed upon the latter will meet with no “kick,” when placed upon the former will inevitably, and rightly so, draw forth a “kick.” Consequently, while capitalism lasts, “kicking” will be necessary on the part of Labor. Finally, seeing that the one thing to do, in order to remove capitalism, is to dislodge it from its political fastness, its hold on the public powers, it is obvious that united political, besides economic, action, by the working class, the overwhelming majority of the people, would not only stem capitalist encroachment but put a end thereto. Capitalism dethroned, the Union that had no mission other than to kick at the capitalist will, must die. It is a biologic principle that the organ that falls into disuse, shrivels, dies away. That merely “kicking” Union, having nothing more to kick at, is bound to lose the use of its kicking apparatus. As that apparatus was all there was of it, with its death that Union must die too. Nor can the consummation of the arrival of that day be too devoutly wished by every lover of his kind.

From the above, coupled with other sections of Socialist science, it follows that Unionism has other purposes besides those of “kicking” and “resisting”; it follows that there must be other Unions besides those that the Mitchells know of or care for. Those are the trades organizations builded with both a kicking or smashing and with a building up apparatus. Those are the organizations that realize the necessity of resistance, and at the same time are imbued with the knowledge that in them lies the future, that they, the organizations of their industries, must be the basis of representation in the Congress of the future, in the parliaments of a rational social order. And these Unions know something else, to wit, that this latter or building-up apparatus, is the essential part of Unionism. Will such Unions be “thrown out of business,” will their “occupation be gone,” would they die on the spot (or later) the moment that, having organized the working class of the land within their folds, they adopted the political manoeuvre of marching to the dethronement of the capitalist oppressor? Far from it! No doubt, the moment they set themselves upon that march, their merely “kicking” or “resisting” apparatus would begin to fall into disuse, IT would begin to die, and would soon expire. But that apparatus that was of their essence, their building-up apparatus, in fact, the germ of future society and civilization, the very soul and substance of Unionism, would then, and then alone,

enter upon its period of life. Only then will it begin to live; now it pines.

Mr. Mitchell's views are illustrative of the rank he and his style of Unions take. The one and the other are arrayed on the capitalist side of the class struggle, where "kicking" is to be a permanency—with occasional political jobs and visions of cabinet offices for the modern "Plebs Leader," the Labor Leader or Fakir.

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