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EDITORIAL

## EASY TO ANSWER.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**T**HE Wichita, Kans., *Social Ethics*, of the 6th instant, has an imaginary dialogue between a stranger and a Socialist Labor Party man, and the same stranger and a Socialist party man. At the close of the dialogue the paper asks whether there could be any doubt which of the two party programs “the average intelligent dissatisfied workingman, to say nothing of the farmer and small business man, would choose”. It declares he would choose the S.P. The answer is too sweeping to be correct. And easy it is to make it correct.

It is a pity that *Social Ethics* caricatured and mutilated the S.L.P. program, and that it even went so far as to mis-state the S.L.P. vote, claiming it had “shrunk 20 per cent. in the last four years”. The actual facts, as they actually are, are strong enough. The times and the dignity of the issue call for clear, calm reasoning. Exaggerations and misstatements tend to interfere with that.

The S.L.P. program and posture is that the emancipation of the Working Class must be the work of the Working Class itself. If the Working Class leans for help or guidance upon any other class, it will be deceived. The class interests of any other class will inevitably cause the latter to use its Working Class allies or patrons, under some lure or other, as food for cannon, as cat’s-paws to draw from the fire the hot chestnuts that that other class lusts after. In order to be free from such danger the workingman must be alive to the interests of his own class, in other words, he must be class-conscious. Only class-consciousness can place the workingman on his guard against, and render him immune to the lures and plausible attractions held out to him by other class interests. Immune to such lures, in short, class-conscious, the Working Class acquires the use of its faculties; it requires eyes to see, ears to hear, a mind to understand; it can then start on the march to its emancipation. The workingman will then realize that he is a wage-slave in capitalist society, an article of merchandise, whose share (wages) in

the wealth that he produces does and must decline, and he will simultaneously perceive that all other classes or subdivisions of classes—middle class, upper capitalist, frenzied financiers, together with all the parasites upon these,—live on him. He will understand the why of the wherefore: the circumstance that his class is stripped of the natural opportunities (land) and of the social opportunities (machinery, i.e., capital) to work with. He will then see the goal towards which he must march—the overthrow of the capitalist system of plunder and the founding of the Socialist Republic, where, the necessities for work being collective property, he who works shall live, and he who can, but won't, shall die. Class-conscious and with the goal clear in his mind, the workingman will be able to distinguish between “issues”, that are only fights between his plunderers, and those that really concern him. He will be able to distinguish between FOOD, to keep him alive on his march to emancipation, and BAIT—seeming food with a hook in it to turn him into real food for somebody else.

He then will need no magnifying glass to detect the hook within the bait of every form of “Unionism” that is a “job-Trust”, that keeps his class divided by high initiation fees and other schemes to keep out men, that does not provide for the organization and support of all the men of the trade, and that is officered by what Mark Hanna well called the “labor-lieutenants” of the Capitalist Class,—he will readily detect the hook in that bait, refuse to be anybody's gudgeon, and join the bona fide Union that is real food and no bait.

He will need no magnifying glass to detect the hook within the bait of all “co-operative” schemes dangled before his nose.

He will need no magnifying glass to detect the hook within the bait of “abundant monetary supply”—he will know that, being a merchandise, his share of the wealth that he produces does not depend upon the abundancy of that wealth, but upon the price of his own merchandise labor-power in the labor-market, and he will have a painful sense of his experience on this head by the recollection that, although there is now an infinitely more “abundant trousery supply”, his share of trousers has not increased, but only his share in more holes in his clothes, and so all along the line with the “abundant” good things. He will know that “abundant money” means more money for the capitalists, not a cent more for him.

He will need no magnifying glass to detect the hook within the bait of “quicken-

business increasing the demand for labor and thus forcing up wages”—he will know that privately owned machinery is displacing labor faster than any “quickenings of business” could possibly bring redress; he will know that business has all along been quickening with an ever declining relative number of workers.

He will need no magnifying glass to detect the middle class hook within the bait of “destruction of robber Trusts and monopolies”—he will know, for one thing, that, if the Trusts and monopolies could be and were really destroyed, the only ones to gain would be the resurrected “small man”, who would in the future, true to his own class interests, whack the life out of the workingmen, the same as the former “small man” did with the former workingmen, so as to get rich and start a Trust himself. For another thing, the class-conscious workingman, immune to bourgeois lures, will know that the middle class is as big a plunderer of the workingman as its weapon (small capital) allows it, and that its only objection to “robber Trusts and monopoly” is, not that these plunder the workingman, but that their weapon to plunder is so more powerful than the weapon of the middle class, that the middle class can not get as large a share of the workingman’s hide as it would wish, and is itself over-powered by the more powerfully equipped “robber Trust and monopoly”. Above all, he will know that the way to handle that magnificent contrivance of production, the Trust, is not to destroy, but to appropriate it for collective use.

He will need no magnifying glass to detect the middle class hook within the bait of “cheap water, cheap light, cheap rides, cheap telephone and telegraph service”—his class-consciousness comes there squarely to his aid. As to telephone and telegraph, he hardly ever has occasion to use them. As to water, light, rides, and such other necessities he is unshakably aware of the fact that the cheaper those things become which he needs, the lower also will be his wages. He knows that he would not then be any worse off, but neither would {he} be any better off, the only one to derive advantage from the cheapening of such things being the middle class. His experience with the free trade baited hook has shown him that. And he knows that this must be so because he is merely a merchandise: the less it takes to keep him the lower is his market value; while, with the middle class, the less it expends, the more it has for itself. He will not bite at that bait.

He will need no magnifying glass to detect the middle class hook within the bait of

“lower taxes”—the same class-consciousness that protects him against wasting his energies on “cheaper goods” will protect him against wasting his energies on “lower taxes”. He knows that he does not pay the taxes; he knows that the taxes are paid out of that portion of the wealth that he produces but that his pockets never even get a smell of; he knows that the taxes are paid out of the wealth that he is plundered of in the shop, that is, out of the profits of his employer; accordingly, he knows that it is the employer who pays the taxes and alone is interested in having them lowered. He won’t bite.

He will need no magnifying glass to detect the political dreamer’s hook within the bait of “popular election of senators”, etc.—he is too well aware being, indeed, class-conscious, first, that numberless are the politicians now chosen by “popular election”, and they all grind him down with capitalist laws; secondly, that, whether politicians are chosen by popular election or not, does not bring him an inch nearer the goal—the collective ownership of the necessaries for work; thirdly, that his improvement can not be brought about by a change of “form” but by a change of the essence of the social system; and fourthly, that all such schemes may entertain children, but that no intelligent man will allow himself to be trepanned with propositions that amount to a “re-shuffling” or a “new deal” from a pack of cards that is stacked. The intelligent man demands, not a “re-shuffling” or a “new deal”, he demands and will see to it that the fraudulent pack be thrown out of the window.

And so forth.

Such is the posture and program of the Socialist Labor Party. So runs every line of the Party’s extensive literature, and such is the language held by all the responsible and authorized mouthpieces of the Party. Addressing to-day an audience, the S.L.P. man will add that a Movement planted upon such a platform must necessarily progress slow at first, but that it can never collapse. He will illustrate his point with the S.L.P. vote. He will show that it has stood still during the last four years—34,191 votes in 1900, 34,172 in 1904—; but on this head he will point out the fact that all other Movements that have sought radical improvements along any other path have done worse than to hold their own by standing still, they have collapsed. He will illustrate the point with the late Populist Movement. All the lures above cited figured in the Populist party; it rose to a million and a quarter votes; it was to “sweep the country at any election”; it

was to improve the condition of the workingman; it was to give them a chance to “keep themselves alive while waiting for complete Socialism”; it was an unqualified condemner of the Socialist Labor Party as a “dead”, a “stagnant”, a “petrified” affair;—in short, the identical language now held for the Socialist party by *Social Ethics* was then held for Populism by the Populist press. The result was to be foreseen. Populism has collapsed. The only ones who made anything out of it were the Peffers and other politicians who got jobs and are now back in the Republican or Democratic parties, together with the Weavers, who got paid-up life insurance policies from the silver-mine owners. As to the workingman he remained where he was, with his nose to the grindstone. He was cheated once more. Upon these facts and reasoning the S.L.P. urges the Working Class to acquire the clearness of vision that will render them “class-conscious, uncompromising, revolutionary, militant Karl Marx Socialists”. Before they do, there will be no progress—except for the folks who hold the shore end of the line, from the other end of which dangles the baited hook in the troubled waters of Labor.

Let, thereupon, the Socialist party man take the stand. Mr. Thos. E. Will, the State Secretary of the Kansas S.P. and Editor of the Wichita, Kans., *Social Ethics*, has stated in that paper, in the dialogue referred to, his party’s program and posture. His office renders his declaration authoritative. No fault can be found with taking his view as representative of his party. Those views are expressed in the long list of baited hooks enumerated above. All that need here be added is his assertion that his party is “a great party which may sweep the country at any election”, while the “S.L.P. vote has shrunk 20 per cent. in the last four years”.

Can there be any doubt as to which of the two parties the “average intelligent dissatisfied workingman, to say nothing of the farmer and small business man will choose”? Hardly!

The average “intelligent workingman” in that audience, will realize the truth of the S.L.P. posture; his is no chicken memory; he may have his doubts as to whether the S.P. representative is a deliberate hook-baiter and re-incarnation of the Kansas Peffer, or whether he is merely an Utopian visionary, a well meaning dreamer, who seeks to teach others before he has taught himself,—who has no knowledge of the real surroundings, and who is purely emotional. The average intelligent workingman may be in doubt upon that; but he will have no doubt that his place is in the S.L.P.

As to the “farmer and small business man”, all capitalists, for that matter, in that audience, ninety-nine per cent. of them will be ingrained class-conscious. They will feel about that S.P. declaration that “them’s their own sentiments”, and in their sleeves they will chuckle at the fool-workingmen who may be once more entrapped into fighting the battles of the petit-bourgeois.

Possibly one per cent. of the “farmers and small business men” or other capitalists in that audience may have a mind clear enough to have had their own class interests shaken by the S.L.P. presentation. That one per cent. may have perceived a glimmer of light that showed them that theirs was a hopeless fight, besides being immoral in that it retards civilization. That one per cent. will leave the meeting with the fresh breath of a new thought thumping in their heads. That one per cent. will betake itself home, and THINK. Fifty per cent. of that one per cent. will be dragged away from its thoughts by the immediate demands of their petty lives; the other fifty per cent. of that one per cent. will attend further meetings of both the S.L.P. and the S.P.; they will invest in the literature of the two parties; they will diligently read the two parties’ organs; they will branch off into further studies; and, finally, like men who thitherto lived in hell and have been purged by study and meditation, they will deliberately step into the ranks of the S.L.P., a valuable acquisition, determined to atone for their own and their ancestors’ past lives of plundering the workingman. They will thenceforth bestow upon the Working Class the benefit they have derived from their own superior opportunities; and they will thenceforth be found uncompromisingly wielding the sword of Revolutionary Socialism against the Capitalist System, in the front ranks of the Fighting S.L.P.

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

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[slpns@slp.org](mailto:slpns@slp.org)