
History Repeats Itself.

[June 16, 1918]

by Sam J. French

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To *The Weekly People*:—

I have often thought of writing anent the amount of Cook County's [Illinois] share in the development of certain pernicious tendencies which have been gathering headway in the Party during the last two years. I did not think, however, that my statements would carry much weight as long as those whose sentiments, opinions, and efforts I have been continually opposing had your ear. Hence I was content to let my voice carry what weight it could here, and trust to time and events to bring to light the true inwardness of things.

Now, however, I think the time is at hand to write at considerable length. I propose to describe recent occurrences in the Section by way of corroboration of the general substance of whatever [Adolph S.] Carm may have written to you on that subject.

Whether the history of the days of 1898-1899 will repeat itself in 1918-1919 or not, time alone will tell, but there seems to me to be no doubt about the genealogy of the sentiments and phrases now re-echoing through the increasingly perturbed atmosphere of SLP internal discussion. What do I mean, echoes of the past? Well, perhaps I am overcritical, suspicious, intolerant of the "broader ideas" of my gentler minded comrades. Be that as it may, the echoes of the past persist and become plainer, and to those of our comrades who are so unconsciously acquiring such expertness in the role of sounding board, I would say, changing the simile to DeLeon's famous poodle analogy, that

thought the little animal have his wool clipped in lion fashion, or have pink bows stuck on his ears, a poodle he still remains; the observer who knows the breed sees through the artful camouflage — the tone of the little rascal's bark and his antics give him away.

What local experience prompts all this outburst of mixed metaphor and would-be humorous philosophy, you ask? To get down to facts, the cause lies in the developments that have taken place in Chicago ever since the abortive Unity Conference out of which so many bizarre occurrences here and elsewhere have proceeded. Recent happenings indicate that such manifestations are neither isolated nor disconnected, and the writer feels that the sooner a clear understanding of this is had throughout the party, the more rapidly will the whole matter be brought to a head and cleared up once for all, so that the morning of July 11, 1919, may dawn upon an SLP as purified, as virile, and as determined to keep its course straight and its beacon light clear, as was the unburdened band that girded its loins with renewed vigor on the morning of July 11, 1899.†

At the June 1 [1918] general party meeting of Section Cook County, Ill., some interesting things happened which tend to throw light on the situation hinted at above. First, in the election of officers, A.S. Carm, having been elected Organizer over Caleb Harrison by a vote of 16 to 13, a technical objection based on the peculiar structure of the Section, which recognizes the language branches as component parts hav-

†- This erstwhile red letter day is not included in the Kuhn/DeLeon/Vogt (so-called "Administration") faction's official chronological recapitulation of the events in its conflict with the *New Yorker Volkszeitung*, which ultimately resulted in the defeat and departure of the Slobodin/Jonas/Hillquit (so-called "Kangaroo") faction. The meaning of that particular date can be easily deduced, however. The insurgent Right faction constituted themselves the General Committee of Section New York, SLP, at a meeting which began at 7 pm on July 10, 1899. This action formalized the split. July 11, 1899, would have been the first day without this group maintaining the pretense of membership in the (Regular) Socialist Labor Party.

ing voice and vote in the general meetings, but permits holding of dual and multiple cards by language members, was raised, that Carm, a Lake View Branch Scandinavian, not having renewed his dual section card until about 2 months ago, was not eligible. The writer, as chairman, ruled that the election stood, there being no constitutional provision to the contrary and being unable to believe the 10 or 12 years in the Federation leaves a man still only a probationary Swede who can not be recognized as an eligible SLP man until a year after he has received the Sacrament of Confirmation in the form of a dual card. An appeal was taken from my decision and the appeal was sustained. So the election for the time being went to Harrison. Not a big thing in itself perhaps, but the sentiments behind it are significant.

Later, Comrade John Handel moved that the organizer be instructed to ask the National Office for copies of any correspondence written by individuals describing conditions in Section Cook County — reason for motion being a reference in recent sub-committee minutes to a letter received by the National Secretary from A.S. Carm.

The eagerness of some of the supporters of the motion to relieve themselves of a large quantity of suppressed emotions impatiently held in leash since hearing the news of the proceedings of the last NEC session, prompted the chair to allow the widest latitude of expression so that all could relieve their bursting cuticle. The result was enlightening, not to say startling. Nobody cared, least of all Carm himself, whose somewhat boastful temperament you know, whether or not the National Secretary complied, but all were soon interested in the appearance of the sweet little pussycat of intrigue which popped out of the bag thus deftly shaken up by the apparent “stupidity” of the chair in allowing the discussion to drift into supposedly irrelevant channels. Comrade Harrison did most of the revealing by gradually waxing quite eloquent in a tirade against our “utterly incompetent NEC,” and reviewing the action of the various members at the recent session. His statements disclosed to us that John M. Francis is utterly unfit and incompetent to represent Illinois; Anton of Pennsylvania is an incompetent old joker in his dotage; Johnson of Connecticut is the equivalent of a strikebreaker; Patty DeLee is a businessman who doesn't know anything about the class

struggle. My old friend John Sweeney has a conservative mentality, a product of his affiliation with a pure and simple union which protects him; Butterworth of New Jersey is a coward who had no nerve to declare himself, etc. — and, meow! out pops pussy — Bob McLure is going to see that the actions of Anton are repudiated. Russell Palmer is going to get after Butterworth. Ed Moonelis is going to settle DeLee. Johnson will be attended to in Connecticut. Max Eisenberg will exert influence in Ohio and our own Comrade Harrison will see to it that Johnny Francis is removed as NEC member from Illinois. The sum total of all the efforts will be the repudiation in referendum of the work of the recent NEC session. Some job. Go to it everybody.

The writer, surrendering the chair, also spoke, expressing the hope that not only this Section but also every Section in the country will rally every available member to the meetings at which the documents to be submitted by the NEC will be discussed and voted upon, and, remarked that DeLeon once said that if there were no SP he would be tempted to found one in order to provide a refuge for certain types of mentality which can not grasp the full significance of the movement. This situation, and the evidence of letter writing and intrigue since the late lamented Unity Conference, indicates that the various elements, with their varied assortment of mental contents from sawdust to cerebral tissue, who have drifted into the stream of the movement need to be washed down through the swift flood of debate, so that like may seek like in accord with the natural law of chemical affinity, and thus crystallize into their respective deposits, as all matter eventually must, before the crystal diamond, the nugget of gold, the lump of silver, or the plain hunk of mud can be distinguished from the mass and perform its function as a separate and distinct entity.

The contention is being made that a little band of stubborn, autocratic dogmatists — Petersen, Kuhn, Zimmerman, and others — made conservative by their training as aristocrats of labor, or their petty business interests, are striving to choke off actual encouragement of direct organization of the WIIU, so as to keep the SLP going as the dominant propaganda organization, preaching industrialism in the abstract only, while those attacking them are fired with the noble ambition to get busy and “build up the movement” by tak-

ing advantage of the favorable phenomena indicating opportunities to promote the growth of the WIIU and bring it into its rightful place in the general scheme of things revolutionary. Of course, Petersen et al. don't care anything about building. They are a bunch of domineering autocrats who are intent only upon running things according to their own stubborn dogmatism and thereby conserving their own positions.

How familiar all this sounds to the ears of one whose memory harks back to the days when Kuhn was the autocrat and DeLeon the pope, and a few others were cardinals and Jesuits to the potential Kangaroos preparing for the 10th of July fiasco, and later, their imitators in miniature, of "logical center" notoriety.

Noting the statements of Harrison and [Julius] Hammer, and taking into account the rumor that Katz is expected here on a missionary trip, one becomes inclined to the belief that it is time someone wrote now "Sign Posts" editorials similar to those of DeLeon which preceded the Kangaroo outbreak.

Seems to me it is the same old story of childish impatience, sentimental desires, and shallow reasoning power — the ignoble trinity which composes the two-headed god of Compromise and Confusion. Shallow reasoning power is the father, sentimental desire the son, and childish impatience the unholy spirit proceeding from the other two in this trinity. The shallow brain of the Kangaroo rendered him unable to discriminate in his sentimental eagerness to get there any old way, and so he catered to everything in sight that he hoped was "coming his way" — with what result, we all know. Similarly with [William E.] Trautmann and the bummery crew in 1907 and 1908 with similar results. In both cases the mental perversity naturally accruing from such a course led to seeking by attacks on individuals and their personalities, to camouflage the real motives for their actions.

Thus we find some of our comrades today apparently trying to emulate the same game. They see the world in the turmoil of a great crisis; they vaguely realize the possibilities of the future; their sentimental

desire to see the workers develop into a determining factor in the affairs of the immediate future prompts them to see people "coming our way" in every group of discontented SP-ites, repentant "wobblies," or "progressive radicals," thus conjuring to their unstable minds the wonderful things that could be done if only our policy were less rigid, and we had more tolerance of variegated opinions. Hence their immature display of impatience with anything that smacks of the "orthodoxy" of deliberate reasoning which calmly looks ahead and figures out the possible outcome of any particular line of tactics rather than impatiently rushing into what seems to be good at the moment. So they act like a bunch of green sailors who can not understand the need for prompt obedience and strict discipline in a gale, when in the previous gentle winds their blunders were laughingly tolerated by the knowing ones.

Mentioning sailors reminds me that DeLeon also compared sentiment without brain to piling sails on an unballasted ship, which, in turn, bids me to remember the fate of a trim little brig called the *Queen of Beauty* which sailed out of my home port in the '80s. Lofty and buoyant she skimmed along faster than her class till she ran into a squall, when, presto! before topsails could be furled she turned bottom down and drowned all hands. She was outward bound for a cargo. Ballast cost money and time and checked speed, but so far from making her destination ahead of time, she went to Davy Jones' Locker — just as our political and economic movements which follow similar tactics are bound to d.

This is my diagnosis of the disease indicated by the present disturbed state of the temperature of those of our comrades who are so rabidly eager to pile on skysails and royal yards while seeming to forget the element of ballast.

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