The IWW and DeLeonism:
Letter to the Editor of *The Worker,* May 22, 1906.

by A.M. Simons

Published in *The Worker* [New York], v. 16, no. 9 (June 2, 1906), pg. 3.

To The Editor of *The Worker:*—

Because I do believe in the principles and tactics of the IWW, and because I see no other way than through that organization by which to maintain, develop, and make effective the power of economic resistance on the part of the working class, I should be traitorous to my own knowledge and belief if I did not attack what I know to be the worst enemy of the IWW. That enemy is the thing which has come to be known as "DeLeonism."

Member after member of the old trade unions and active workers for the cause of Socialism — and these men whose fidelity and constancy to the cause of labor and Socialism is proven by years of tried service — have told me that the one thing that stood in the way of their active support of the IWW was their distrust of DeLeon, based upon the knowledge of his years of tricky dishonesty in the labor and Socialist movement.

I do not believe such an excuse is sufficient. It appears to mea to be a sign of weakness, if not cowardice. But we are dealing with facts, not theories, and it is a fact that the strongest ally of Gompers & Co. in their war upon the IWW is the presence of DeLeon within that organization. To attempt to discuss the IWW, therefore, with this phase omitted, is to dodge a decisive point.

When the first conference was held in January 1905, there was only the slightest hint of any affiliation of DeLeon. He craftily kept himself in the background, knowing that his presence at such a meeting would have damned the organization to stillbirth.

When the "Manifesto" appeared, he pretended to have seen a great light. The SLP and the ST&LA had faded away like the cat in *Alice in Wonderland,* leaving only a snarl (instead of a smile) behind. So, although neither of these organizations, or DeLeon himself, had ever heard of industrialism, and had always maintained as a fundamental principle that the economic organization should be subordinate to the political, yet he at once announced that an industrial organization independent of party affiliations was a justification of his tactics.

He therefore fastened himself upon the IWW, where he has proven to be a veritable "Old Man of the Sea." In so doing he found a few new dupes to add to those select few who still cling to him, and these have promulgated the doctrine that the first article of faith in the orthodoxy of the IWW was to swear to the divine right of DeLeon. Anyone who refused to do this was at once assaulted by all the mud batteries at the command of the Professor of Lying and Vilification. Just as far as these tactics have prevailed the IWW has stagnated and become a stench, even as did the ST&LA before it; in so far as the tactics of President Sherman and the leaders of the WFM, and the original principles of the IWW have prevailed, the organization has grown and been effective.

Mounted upon this new rostrum, and using the IWW as a means of advertising his wares, DeLeon has been able to revive a lot of stuff that was buried for one generation of Socialists some 7 years ago.† But a new generation of Socialists arises about every 5 years,

†- That is, during the split of 1899-1900, when an insurgent Right Wing fought for control of the SLP, lost, and departed.

and it is to these prospective buyers that he is offering his badly decayed goods.

To these possible new dupes DeLeon comes with some stupendous bluff and lying intrigue with which he has always fought and the exposure of which has always sufficed to defeat him.

He poses as a great Marxist, and has repeated his virtues along this line so continuously that hundreds of people believe him to be an authority on Marxian doctrines. [Lucien] Sanial has exposed his ignorance of Marxian economics in a recent article in *The Worker,* something to which I called attention some 6 years ago, while Sanial was still lending his aid to DeLeon. I wish particularly here to call attention to his striking ignorance of another phase of Marxian thought. The present SLP platform and DeLeon's defense of it in the last SLP convention shows that he possesses about the same knowledge of the Marxian philosophy of history that he does of respect for the truth in discussion. It is doubtful if a more striking example could be found in any capitalist history of the adoption of the bourgeois idea that history should be studied to find "examples" to be followed or avoided, than is seen in DeLeon's *Two Pages of Roman History* and his introduction and comment on the *Eighteenth Brumaire* [by Marx]. There is not the slightest sign of any comprehension of the first idea of Marxism — the evolutionary dialectic. After this it seems scarcely necessary to call attention to the depth of ignorance of American history which sees a proletarian revolt in the American Revolution.

He has also succeeded in coupling on to the IWW some of his other pet schemes. It has even come about that some of his dupes consider that it is necessary to first avow a belief in a "party-owned press" before it is possible to become a bona fide supporter of industrial unionism.

It speaks poorly for the intelligence of some members of the SP that they have bit at such thinly disguised gudgeon bait. The fact is that there are numerous SP papers much more nearly "party-owned" and certainly more effectively controlled by the party than *The People.* The *Chicago Socialist, The Worker,* the *International Socialist Review,* and many others are so directly responsive to party control that they dare not violate any will of the party, especially since none of them have the party machine in their vest pocket with which to enforce their control upon the party. The fact is that there is no paper, privately owned or otherwise, that presumes to advocate Socialism, in which there is so little free speech, and which is so completely the organ of one man as is *The People.*

I would suggest to some of those comrades who took part in the New Jersey [SP-SLP Unity] conference, and showed such masterly ignorance of the history of the Socialist movement in this country, that they learn the following incident by heart as an illustration of what has taken place dozens of times and is known to those who have been in the Socialist movement for more than 5 years.

In the spring of 1899, Section Chicago, then the second largest section of the SLP in the United States, passed a resolution calling for an early national convention. DeLeon did not wish the convention. Neither did he wish the membership to know that it had been asked for by Section Chicago. So, when the resolution was forwarded to him by James S. Smith, now State Secretary of the SP of Illinois, for publication in *The People* and presentation to the NEC, DeLeon quietly stole and suppressed it. Soon letters of inquiry from Section Chicago followed. DeLeon denied ever receiving it. All this gave the delay which DeLeon wanted. Then came the split of July 1899. In the midst of one of his vitriolic attacks on Section Chicago, DeLeon let his anger get the better of his discretion, or else he lacked that perfect memory which is so essential to a successful liar, and made use of some information contained in the same letter enclosing the resolution. This, of course, at once exposed him as a liar and a thief of matter committed to him in trust for the party. When thus exposed he finally through the "Letter Box" admitted that the original letter with the resolution had been received, but had been "overlooked."

Similar incidents of suppression, lying, and trickery are known to hundreds of Socialist throughout the country, and wherever such comrades exist, there is found one who looks with distrust upon the IWW, if to support it he must swallow DeLeon and his "party-owned press."

No other Socialist paper, privately or party-owned, would dare to maintain such secrecy concerning its finances as does DeLeon's *People.* A diligent search of the files of that paper and of the convention reports fails to show any detailed financial report of

the income and expenses of the *Daily People* plant. It would be interesting to know just how much is received each year by that paper for printing fake labor papers, political blackmailing sheets, and similar publications, and how far this went toward meeting the deficit on *The Daily People.* We have been told that this deficit is met by the SLP. We would like to see the books on that point. Whether what he states is true or not, no one knows. But it is certain that no SP paper would be permitted to maintain such a condition as this.

But as yet, DeLeonism has by no means captured the IWW. Nor do I believe that it will ever capture it. I cannot believe that the membership of that organization can be duped into such suicidal policy, for suicidal it is. The moment that DeLeon and his crowd makes good the boasts which such men as Veal of Illinois are now making that they will "capture the next IWW convention," then it will be time to hold the funeral of the IWW.

But so long as the principles of the IWW are sound, and those of the AF of L are false and antiquated; so long as it fights a battle of education, while the AF of L carries on a campaign of deception; so long as one supports Socialism and the other capitalism, just that long I shall give what little support is in my power to the IWW, and shall fight its enemies, both within and without.

Fraternally,

A.M. Simons,

Chicago, Ill, May 22 [1906].

Edited by Tim Davenport.
Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2007. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.

http://www.marxisthistory.org