

Daniel De Leon

Editorial: The Philosophy of the History of Political Parties

Our brother, the *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, launches forth a theory on political parties that, if correct, should cause history to be forthwith recast.

It says:

“Political parties, no matter what their name—whether Republican, Democratic, People’s, Socialist or Prohibition—are short-lived, vacillating, changeable things that invariably become corrupt before they become of age.”

As far as we know anything about the history of political parties, in this and all other countries, the facts deny the theory of the *Journal’s* philosopher, that political parties are vacillating, etc., and that they invariably become corrupt before they become of age.

The Republican party, born of a people’s determination to abolish chattel slavery; inspired by Lincoln’s great motto: “This country must be either all slave or all free,” and nailing to its masthead the principle set down in its platform: “The normal condition of the territory of the United States is that of freedom”; that party never once vacillated, unless to tack against adverse and fierce winds with the eye steady on the goal to be reached can be styled vaccination. Nor is it true that it became corrupt before it became of age. During its manhood it was pure and unsullied, as a body, and true to its mission, unswerving in its purpose. After it had accomplished its mission, and not until after its old age, did it grow corrupt. With nothing more to do than to hunt for jobs it ran to seed.

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The Democratic party, born by the democratic breath of Jefferson, determined that this should be a democratic country in fact as well as in name, and it set its face against the Hamiltonian design to make us an oligarchy of the “well-born and well-to-do.” With this clear object before it, it fought and succeeded in overthrowing almost everywhere the property qualifications that originally hampered our suffrage. It is not true that it vacillated or became corrupt before it became of age. During its manhood it was the inspiration of noble and pure sentiments. After, however, it had in the main and very substantially accomplished its mission, and not until after its old age, did it become corrupt. Like the Republican party, with nothing more to do than to get offices for its camp followers, it ran into the ground.

This is the history, not of the leading old political parties of this country alone, it is the history of all political parties born anywhere of a positive movement. From the facts thrown up by them the philosophy of the history of political parties can be determined. It is this:

“A political party with a clear-cut central idea and programme soundly planted attracts stalwarts that bring it up to manhood, lead it to victory and put its programme through. After its historic mission is fulfilled, it, like the butterfly that has laid its eggs, wilts and decomposes. It may continue to exist for a time, but if it does, it does so only as an historic cripple, ripe for overthrow by the next virile movement that should give birth to another political party possessed of a vigor imparting, and, consequently, victory-assuring programme.”

Tested by this test one can easily cast the horoscope of any political party that may come up.

The Prohibition party, for instance, is planted upon a sociologic fallacy. It strives to remove poverty by removing alcohol. History shows that popular drunkenness falls off like the scab from a wound that is healed just as soon as want and the fear of want are removed. On false foundations no successful political superstructure can be reared. The

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Prohibition party will consequently vacillate; and we have seen it recently not only embody questions foreign to its central idea, but one wing leaning toward Socialism, while another is reacting backward toward intensified capitalism. It was born a dwarf and never can grow into manhood.

The People's party, so called, proceeds upon a social and economic contradiction. It carefully and deliberately abstains from denying the right of private ownership in things necessary to produce the necessities of life, and yet it denies or would escape the consequences of its promises. It wants private ownership of land and capital, but rears up against private monopoly, trusts, banks, etc. He who starts from the idea of private ownership subscribes to trusts, Rothschilds, etc. You can't stick your finger in the fire and then kick that you are burned. It follows that the People's party must vacillate, that corruption must mortify its body, and that it is still-born. From all parts of the country the evidences throng to the bar to demonstrate the truth of this charge.

Different, altogether, is the case with the Socialist Labor party. Planted upon a clear-cut central idea and a programme that nothing can shake and that will remain unshaken so long as 2 plus 2 equal 4, neither vacillation nor corruption can enter its ranks before it has reached manhood and triumphed. It points to the self-evident fact that production has become collective, and it draws the inevitable conclusion that the system of ownership must likewise be turned from a private into a collective one. It points to the historic fact that this change implies a social revolution; that the class called upon to accomplish it is the proletariat or wage-slave class, because its economic needs dictate the programme; that it is the historic mission of that class, by establishing the Co-operative Commonwealth, to abolish all class distinctions, and thereby to redeem mankind; and, lastly and consequently, that the Socialist Labor party is the party of the people, to whose standard all the intelligence, decency and manhood of the country is bound to flock. Such a party, as the long history

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behind all the Socialist Labor parties of other countries attests, is built on the Rock of Ages; it can not be swerved; it cannot be polluted.

Philosophy is a deduction from facts, not from fiction. And such is the philosophy of the history of political parties.

The funny man, Mark Twain, built himself a house near Boston with the back turned to the street. The *Journal of the Knights of Labor* plants itself with its back to history. In a funny man the joke is pardonable; it is not pardonable in the organ of the order founded by the Socialist, Uriah S. Stephens.

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