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EDITORIAL

THE APPROACHING SKIRMISHES.

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THIS year's annual convention of the United National Association of Post Office Clerks is to be held in Nashville, Tenn. In the January issue of *The Postal Clerk*, there is given a descriptive account of the advantages of the 1903 convention city. Among the features set forth, and upon which much stress is laid, is the municipalization of "public utilities" by the city.

Aside from the usually municipally conducted police and fire departments, Nashville owns and maintains its water works and an electric light plant for street lighting purposes. The city "has the reputation of being the best lighted city in the South." A city hospital and a free dispensary are other municipal enterprises. Even the sprinkling of the streets is a city affair. The writer in *The Postal Clerk* then informs us that: "The municipal ownership of ALL public utilities idea has a strong majority among the voters of Nashville and it is not improbable that other public utilities may be operated by the municipal corporation."

As the season of municipal campaigns is near at hand it may not be inopportune to consider the "advantages of municipalization" a la Nashville, and the position of the Socialist Labor Party toward such municipal ownership.

Municipal campaigns test the tactics of our Party much more severely than do State and national campaigns. These bring out clearly the issues underlying all campaigns—the issue of Labor against Capitalism. But municipal issues, "good government," "cheap gas," "cheap fares," and the like, are alluring to the unripe voters; especially in these days when the capitalists throw in "labor" candidates as additional sops.

For the very reason that municipal campaigns give less opportunity to push forward S.L.P. issues it becomes all the more important that these issues be not deviated from. It

is the practice of “reform” and “Socialist” parties to put forth a municipal platform the length of one’s arm. Of course, such platforms state that the municipalization advocated is for the benefit of the workers in the “utilities” considered.

Cheap gas, cheap fares and other cheap things of that kind lead entirely away from S.L.P. principles and aims. Such cheapness is the last thing that the S.L.P. is after. Under capitalism labor is a merchandise, and anything that tends to cheapen the things needed to keep the workingman alive cheapens the exchange value of his labor power. If transportation were furnished the workman free, his wages would come down ten cents per day.

That this is no exaggeration is shown by the practice of the railroad companies. Ask the average railroad man what are his wages and he will name the money figure, adding: “And a pass.” When the roads gave a recent increase in wages THEY CALLED IN ALL PASSES AND COMPELLED THEIR EMPLOYEES TO PAY AT LEAST HALF FARE!

There are people, undoubtedly, who would be money in {in hand?} if gas, etc., were cheaper; but they have something else to sell than their own hides. No matter how much it might benefit them it could not benefit the worker.

It cannot too often be driven home that the S.L.P. has not the MARKET—distribution—for its objective point. Our objective point is not the market, but the FACTORY—production. Once the worker is master of the tools of production the rest goes of itself.

Municipal agitation for cheapness is capitalist and middle class agitation. The S.L.P. knows that whatever is cheapened for the workers makes cheaper workers for those who exploit them. The S.L.P. seeks to put the gas plant and the street railroad in the hands of the workers as part of its plan to rid the worker of the capitalist parasite. Not cheaper things for the worker, but all that he produces; that is the issue.

Nashville is the largest manufacturing point in Tennessee, and yet despite its municipalization of public utilities thousands of sick and injured must seek the mercy of the hospital. *The Postal Clerk* says that at the free dispensary “the needy can obtain medicines at all times.” The needy we have with us always, municipalization or no municipalization!

The S.L.P. is drilling and deploying its forces for the Social Revolution. All the more

necessary then that in municipal campaigns it declare that these, even though successful, furnish no “practical illustration” of Socialism. Never let the fact be lost sight of that nothing less than the nation can furnish an illustration of Socialism.

The issue thrust forward by the S.L.P. is a national issue. Municipal campaigns are important only in so far as they are in touch with the national revolutionary thought. Every municipal campaign, therefore, should be conducted as a skirmish on the line of march to Washington—the real objective point.

Conducting our municipal campaigns thus we are not likely to attract and be elated by a vote that at the next election will dishearten by melting like snow before the sun. The signs of the times are that “Hurrah Campaigns” in municipal elections, will be the order of the day. Its present strength is measured by the soundness of its vote—the votes that cannot be turned away. These, though few comparatively, are better than a large vote on which no dependence can be placed. Unswerving firmness to the main issue—Labor against Capitalism—is the pre-eminent principle that should guide our tactics, and every detail of our tactics, in all campaigns.

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