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EDITORIAL

“IMPOSSIBILISM.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

IN the answer to a correspondent, calling upon it to define its attitude toward the Industrial Workers of the World, the Los Angeles privately-owned *Common Sense* admits that “craft unionism has been playing into the hands of the enemy,” on account of which it “hails with the spirit of true comradeship a truly Socialist economic organization such as is the Industrial Workers of the World,” and thereupon proceeds to qualify its hail by declaring that it would “rather see it (the identical I.W.W.) die than live, and that quickly” if it is to be “used as a means of revivifying and bolstering up an impossibilist political party that does more damage to the cause of Socialism than good, and if it seeks to be a means of rupture of the Socialist party itself.”

“Impossibilism” is a term that means different things in different countries. Its meaning in each instance is to be gathered from the things that are considered impossible by those who set up the term “Impossibilism,” and are considered possible and necessary by those against whom the term is hurled. Here in America “Impossibilism” is the name that has been given to the following code of principles:

“First. A Socialist political organization is a kite without a tail, a gun loaded with powder and no bullet, noise, signifying nothing, unless it is the conscious and direct reflex of a class-conscious, that is, a Socialist economic organization, upon which it is banked, and through which its aspirations to take and hold the administration of the land can be realized.

“Second. An effective Socialist political organization is, therefore, bound to give as much thought to the economic requirements of the Movement as to the political. It is bound to endeavor to straighten out economic organizations whose construction renders them handmaids to the Capitalist Class; and, if its efforts in that direction fail, then to recognize that such economic organizations are officered by labor-

lieutenants of the labor-exploiters, and to expose and to oppose the masked bulwarks of capitalism. On the other hand, the loyalty of such a Socialist political body and all the arms of its arsenal are due without stint to that economic organization that is an earnest of the realization of its aspirations to overthrow the capitalist regime.

“Third. No Socialist political organization can escape its economic organization affinity. The attempt to do so is the ostrich fatuous trick. Even if a Socialist political body sought to ignore the Question of Unionism, the Question of Unionism will not ignore it. The inevitable result of such a policy of cowardice is to lapse under the domination of capitalist “Unionism,” and thence unavoidably into corruption and treason.”

Such, in condensed form, are the tenets that have been dubbed “Impossibilism.” These tenets may be still further condensed into the maxim: “No Socialist Unionism, no emancipation of the Working Class, no Socialist Republic.” The Los Angeles *Common Sense* admits the I.W.W. to be a “truly Socialist economic organization,” nevertheless, it would rather see such a truly Socialist body “die than live, and that quickly”—if that admittedly good thing should lead to certain results!

Such exactly was the intellectual posture of the statue-makers of Diana when, realizing that Christianity would wipe away their occupation, they ran through the streets of Ephesus crying: “Great is Diana!” Such exactly was the intellectual posture of the clergy towards Kepler’s work on astronomy that they realized threatened to overthrow the myth of the earth being the center of the universe, and thereby to affect their rule. Such, exactly, is, to-day, the intellectual posture of the same element towards evolution. Aye, such, exactly, is the posture of the Capitalist Class towards Socialism. The feature of the intellectual posture of all of these ever was and is a dodging and a begging of the question: either to shut their eyes to the merit of a Movement, or, if their eyes could not be wholly shut thereto, admit its virtues, but “rather see it die than live, and that quickly,” if, in either case, it might endanger—what?—THEIR SUPERSTITIONS, or THEIR INTERESTS. It is the posture of the bigot, or the self-seeker, and, as everybody knows, the dividing line between the two is not always ascertainable. Such is not the posture of the intellectually and morally healthy. With these, if that which is recognized as sound

leads to results that interests, or habits of thought, render unpalatable, then, the conclusion is—not “Perish the admittedly good!”—but “Let us thoroughly overhaul our former habits of thought and look critically into our interests, and if we see that either will not stand in the light of what is true, then, perish they, and not it!” Such, in fact, and not the privately owned *Common Sense*’s, is the posture of the intellectually and morally healthy Socialists of the land, to-day, who, holding that the I.W.W. is the rockbed of Socialist unity and triumph, are gathering there, regardless of what fetiches they thereby forsake, or what amendments they may have to adopt to previous views.

And why should not they? Complete Truth never yet was the sole possession of any man, or body of men. Even if it ever were, he is an arrant fool who imagines he can not err. The sane man ever leaves a broad margin for corrections. Even, therefore, in the extreme case that he is absolutely right, the wrestling with a sincere adversary, however wrong the latter, contributes to fortify the former’s Truth, contributes to make it clearer to his adversary, and thereby to himself as well. The Truth thus established becomes the joint product of BOTH; they both wrestled for and won it jointly. Why should they not join hands and enjoy the fruit of their joint conquest? Only bigotry, selfish interest or malignity could interfere—these the healthy Socialist casts behind him and tramples under foot. As with men, so with bodies of men.

“Mention not that stupid word to me!” cried Mirabeau to the weakling who said a certain move was “impossible.” All is possible to the now uniting Socialists of our land.

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