

EDITORIAL

BERGER BELLYACHING.

By DANIEL DE LEON

ELSEWHERE we publish for the delectation of our readers an article from the *Social Democratic Herald*¹ in which Victor L. Berger urges his party not to vote in favor of holding a national convention this year. The article, beginning with its title, is a series of fits that tell of serious abdominal gripes.

“Don’t vote like sheep for a national party convention! The plan is dangerous!” thus runs the first fit, and it is closely followed by this other: “because it is well known that in a referendum every question usually carries”.—What an insult to a revolutionary organization, if it is an organization of men! If the language is justified, what an admission! Men do not, never run the danger of voting like sheep. Sheep can not constitute a body fit to overthrow capitalism. Berger’s gripes in either case bereave him of sense. He either insults his own party, or he tells the truth about it—the act of a man crazed with pain.

And then comes this wail-accompanied fit: In the same breath that he admits there are certain “tactical differences of opinion in regard to trade unions”, and that, if these are ventilated in a convention of his party, “they will tear the party to pieces”, in that same breath he doubles up and screams: “these tactical differences do not belong in the forum of a Socialist convention!”—Wonderful reasoning! If the differences of opinion are “tactical” then they certainly do belong “in the forum of a Socialist convention”. If they do not belong “in the forum of a Socialist convention” then they are not “tactical”, and impossible would it be for them to “tear the party to pieces”. A lot of loose nails in a keg that is violently shaken do not jar against one another with greater clatter than the thoughts of a man, whom gripes are doubling up in pain.

¹ [“Don’t Vote Like Sheep for a National Convention,” *Social Democratic Herald*, Feb. 17, 1906. See page 3, below.—R.B.]

The next fit is upon the “unity question”. He calls it a “brand new one” the question “of uniting with the Socialist Labor Party”.—Surely the theory must be correct that pain spoils memory. Only by that theory can the gentleman’s bad memory be explained. “The question of uniting with the Socialist Labor Party” is about the oldest of all questions that have agitated the gentleman’s camp, especially his particular sub-camp, as far back as the early part of 1901, five years ago—witness certain telegrams in the archives of this office. A man in pain has no memory.

And so it goes on from fit to fit. But even the most continuous series of fits of pain has its instants of lull. So has the gentleman’s, and then he rises, true to himself. “Every Social Democrat” he declares in one of these lulls “is compelled to fight any fusion” with the “impossibilist S.L.P”. This is true. With that we agree, both in principle and practice, what is more, the determination is mutual. Fusion is impossible between men, on the one hand, who, like the S.L.P., come and can come in contact with the capitalist or his outposts, only for war, and men, on the other hand, who are so interlinked with the capitalist or his outposts, with capitalist candidates and with the labor lieutenants of the capitalist, as to be most of the time undistinguishable from these plunderers and betrayers of the Working Class. No fusion there, so say we both. The material interests of both break too deep and wide a chasm for fusion to overbridge.

Berger, of the “party-owned” *Social Democratic Herald*, and the “party-owned” Volkszeitung Corporation should alternately lay their aching heads upon each others’ {sic} thumping bosom—they might do that at least during the lulls of the paroxysms of their gripes, which, according to the French students’ song, differ from the pangs of love only in that the latter tear up the heart, while the former tear up the entrails.

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DON'T VOTE LIKE SHEEP FOR A NATIONAL CONVENTION!

The Plan Is Dangerous.

(From the Milwaukee *Social Democratic Herald*, Feb. 17, 1906.)

There are certain individuals in the Socialist party who love to talk and whose chief joy and ambition in life is to “shine in conventions.” These people want to hold a great extra convention in 1906, ostensibly for the purpose of constructing a new platform for the party and revising our articles of faith. These comrades—they are especially numerous in Chicago—have submitted resolutions calling for a convention to a party referendum. They reckon on the adoption of these resolutions—although the question is put stupidly and unconstitutionally—because it is well known that in a referendum every question usually carries.

We can however see no necessity for this extra convention. It will certainly cost a stack of money. It can do no good at this time. At best it will make a lot of trouble. And in all probability it will split the party.

And for various reasons.

Such a convention would, for instance, furnish a fine opportunity to fan the flame of certain tactical differences of opinion in regard to trade unions. Although these tactical differences are purely trades union matters, and do not belong in the forum of a Socialist convention, it is certain that they will be forced there, and it is also certain that if forced there they will tear the party to pieces. But that is just the very thing that certain fanatics and also certain schemers desire.

Then there is also a chance to split the

party on the “unity question.” For after having had several “unity questions” in the past, we have a brand new one before us now—that is the question of uniting with the Socialist Labor Party. Within the last few weeks several conferences have been held for the purpose of uniting the Socialist and the Socialist Labor Parties. Three such conferences have been held in New Jersey and arrangements are already under way for the same thing in Colorado.

In reality there is nothing to unite with, because the S.L.P. is dead, and there is only a small trace of it left even in New York. But Eugene V. Debs and other good fellows, but poor musicians, have raised a cry, and some bad fellows, but good musicians, have taken it up, and we will be up against it, if the convention is held at this time. Yet every Social Democrat is compelled to fight any fusion of that type. And we will fight it, not for personal reasons, not even for tactical differences, but for differences in principle. The S.L.P. is preaching a brand of impossibilism, which, if instilled into our own party, would make it even more impotent than it is now in some vicinities—and the dry rot would kill it as surely as it killed the S.L.P. We have more impossibilism, hypocrisy and cant in the party now than is good for it—we ought to try and get rid of all that poison, instead of getting more of it.

And last, but not least, a convention would give the schemers and leeches in our

own party a good chance to split it by trying to imitate the constitution of the S.L.P. in our party. They will no doubt try to do away with State autonomy, and endeavor to establish an official party organ. In short, they will try to create a bureaucracy of leeches, grafters, and hoodoos. Even Eugene V. Debs is repeating the old, silly De Leon cry about the "privately owned press," which is very misleading and false, because, for instance, the nearest approach to a party owned paper is the *Social Democratic Herald*, the Central Committee owning the most stock—while the *New York People* is in reality the paper that is LEAST under the control of its party. Yet, we have a good many men who will parrot-like repeat the phrases that are thrown out for the unthinking. Furthermore, we have some men in our party, who are a hundred times more unscrupulous than De Leon, and have not a hundredth part of his brains, training and education. These fellows hate De Leon and are jealous of him, but they would like to establish a De Leon organization in our party with themselves on top. But between De Leon and our imitation De Leons we would a thousand times rather choose De

Leon, who is at least a man.

Moreover, this extra convention would play right into the hands of the "uncompromising" theorists of a more or less impossibilist type to make the most of their "clear cut class-consciousness," so-called.

As for the national platform, it is already "holy" enough and long winded enough. It was framed at the last national convention by the Rev. George D. Herron, and was then considered the eighth wonder of the world by some of the very same people who now want other phrases. The quintessence of Socialism is of course contained in our present national platform, otherwise we would not have accepted it. And it went safely through the last national campaign, and surely it can hold together, till the next REGULAR CONVENTION. These men who are now bent on tearing up the "only American platform" ever constructed, are as a rule the men who swear to-day that no one can be a true Socialist without this or that phrase, and to-morrow are ready to finally tear the party all to pieces if the phrase is not altered, and "their" holy words inserted.

We are decidedly opposed to calling an extra convention.

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

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