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THIRD EDITORIAL

NO, THANK YOU!

By DANIEL DE LEON

Facilis est descensus Averni.
(Easy is the slide down to Hades.)

The soundness of the judgment of the S.L.P. National Convention of 1896 in pronouncing the A.F. of L. and K. of L. hopelessly corrupt and the buffers for the capitalist class; its wisdom in hailing and endorsing the formation of the Socialist Trade & Labor Alliance; its correct penetration in recognizing the folly of any longer seeking to propitiate a labor leadership that had proven itself abidingly ignorant and dishonest, or of further “boring from within”; its clearness of vision as to the fatal consequences of such old tactics;—all that has recently received a remarkable comprobatation.

On the 3d instant, the *New Yorker Volkszeitung* published reportorially an account of the misdeeds of the Whitestone Association of Marble Polishers. This “union,” apart from indulging in virtual scabbing, placed the initiation fee for the admission of new members of \$50; when applicants from an other union were willing to submit to this imposition, and the \$50 fee seemed to fail of its purpose to act as a bar against newcomers, the fee WAS RAISED TO \$100; and, finally, when applicants were willing to pay even this sum, the Whitestone Association shut down; it declared the books closed, and refused to admit any new members. This was but one of the many typical instances of the preposterousness of “pure and simpledom”; it was but one of the many manifestations of a total lack of the sense of solidarity in such concerns, of their ignorance both upon the duties and the mission of the bona fide union, and of their utter incapacity to organize, let alone solidify the working class.

This notwithstanding, the *New Yorker Volkszeitung* of the next day published on the subject this editorial comment:

The rivalry between the organizations of marble workers recalls many a similar black page in the history of the American working class.

The organizing of RIVAL UNIONS in the same trade is always a gross error, whatever the motives and purposes thereof may be. It is a blow in the face of the sense of solidarity; and can never and nevermore promote the forward march of the working class, whether economic or political.

It was only last December 14, that the *New Yorker Volkszeitung*, aiming a surreptitious blow at the Party policy with regard to its S.T. & L.A. tactics, suggested that the better way to make progress was to stay inside of the old corrupt National-Central organizations of Labor and “bore forward from within”; now it slides several pegs lower and condemns the organization of a “rival union” even where the existing pure and simple concern shuts the door in the face of newcomers, and flat-footedly refuses admission to anyone else, thus depriving anybody of the first prerequisite for “boring forward from within,” i.e., the prerequisite of getting “within.” What does this mean? It means that the downward-moving stages in the development of the *New Yorker Volkszeitung* on the tactical question of trade unionism are these:

First, if you ARE WITHIN a corruptly and ignorantly run trades union, whose every breath is a slap in the face of solidarity, you must not step out; you must continue to uphold the corrupt concern with your funds and with your efforts, and continue thereby to add prestige and capitalist market-value to the Labor Fakirs in control; from within, you may “bore forward” to your heart’s content: preach Socialism, be dumped and kicked and hounded for it by the Labor Fakirs in control, and by your conduct help spread the sense of impotence among the rank and file towards their misleaders; but, to start a rival organization?—no, NEVERRRR!

Next, if you are NOT WITHIN such an organization, and you seek to get in to experiment in “boring,” and the organization shuts its door in your face, and refuses to let you in, then crawl down on your belly like a heathen before his Mumbo Jumbo; never, no neverrrr raise an impious hand against the sacrosanct concern; never, neverrrr start a rival union; to do that is to aim a blow at the face of solidarity!

Easy, indeed, is the slide down to Hades! Once on that inclined plane, the descent is swift; and, let it be noted, every step downward is but the logical sequence of the first false step. How false the first step of the *New Yorker Volkszeitung* was is thus best illustrated by this its second step,—a step that must be pie to the capitalist

class. Already capitalists are mattressing themselves up with bogus unions, whom they own as they own their coats, and which they set up as preventers of bona fide organizations of labor; let the capitalists but feel confident that the Socialist Movement of the land will take this view of the subject, and never dare set up a "rival union," whatever the provocation, and they will have easy sailing. But the Socialist Movement will not. What it says "NEVER!" to is to the notion that it will ever allow itself to be humbugged with a name or a phrase, or be drawn from the direct {and} forthright prescribed by its course.

But not yet does the *New Yorker Volkszeitung's* utterance of April 4 register the lowest stage it has reached on this subject. Somebody must have protested against its heinous stand of April 4; on the next day it publishes editorially an explanation. Does the explanation retract the preposterous utterance? No. Does it even frankly stick to it? No. It does worse: it seeks by verbiage and by shoving the point at issue further back to conceal and dilute the poison. It says:

We stated yesterday at this place, in connection with the rivalry between the organizations of marble workers, that the organization of rival unions of the same trade always is a gross error, a blow in the face of the sense of solidarity.

Of course we never could mean thereby to defend or approve the measures of the marble polishers, the Whitestone Association. A labor organization, which, like the Whitestone Association, shuts itself off by means of abnormal admission fees against the members of its own trade; which, in cases of labor struggles, fails to render the promised help; which lends itself to the taking of the places of men on strike; in short, which slaps the solidarity of the workers in the face,—such an organization does not deserve the name of a Union. It should be brought to its senses by the united action of such workers' unions whose members are compelled to work together with the members of such an organization, the Whitestone Association in this case.

Such a Union is no union of workers for the protection of the trade; it is an ossified guild in the interest of a small number of self-seeking people, whom to fight is in the interest of the all. The local building trades workers should unitedly take a stand against the Whitestone Association.

Stripped of its tinsel, this means that such a preposterous "Union" as the Whitestone Association may not be fought except by the existing unions in the building trades; and, seeing that these unions are, if not exactly, still to a great extent and substantially run upon the same ignorant and corrupt lines as the Whitestone Association; seeing that the leaderships of these unions is of the same kidney as that of the Whitestone Association; seeing that these unions have

tolerated the misdeeds of the Whitestone Association and have stood by it; seeing, in short, that these unions, just like the Whitestone Association are standing slaps in the face of Solidarity;—seeing all this, the above passage means nothing else but that:

If these other Unions, most of which are essentially no better than the Whitestone Association and have been all along its allies, and therefore, “whom to fight is in the interest of the whole working class,”—if these Unions don’t choose to fight the Whitestone Association, then it must not be fought at all.

“Not much!” thunders back the Socialist Movement; “we care not to increase our own labors; if a thing called a ‘union,’ but in fact a close corporation whose very existence is a denial of solidarity, is fought by others, so much the better; but if it is not, then to the full extent that the Socialist Movement can, and as soon as it can, it will fight and crush such a viperous centre; nor shall we be deterred therefrom by having the word ‘Solidarity’ flaunted in our faces, any more than the palmer-warriors (?) in the legend were deterred in their career by the figure of the Cross being held up in their way by Satan!”

Facilis est descensus Averni. Let those who choose travel that way; the S.L.P. has placed itself unfalteringly upon a different plane; and it politely declines the invitation to move in a direction that leads by easy and swift stages down to Hades.

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