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ARTICLE

TEN YEARS LATER: 1889–1899

By DANIEL DE LEON

Under the title “Ten Years Later,” Dumas wrote one of his most interesting, instructive and thrilling historical novels. The historic tale to be unfolded here in this article under the identical title may be found equally interesting, instructive and thrilling, if not more so, and inspiring besides to the student, especially the lover of the movement in America.

Ten years ago, the Socialist Labor Party was a “party” in name only. It is essential to a political party, first, that it be a pulsation of the national life of the country itself in which the party springs up; and, secondly, that it be politically active. That which ten years ago called itself the “Socialist Labor Party,” lacked both essentials. The organization was not born of the throbbings of life in America; it was the result of political turmoils in Germany; in the quarry of American political development, it was not a formation of this soil: the organization was like gravel that one often finds upon ground of different geologic formation, shot off thither by volcanic eruptions from distant parts. As an inevitable result hereof, political activity, or anything deserving the name, was excluded. The membership located mainly in New York, limited itself to “agitation”—after a style; but they knew not their ground, evoked no response, and, owing to the frequently repulsive mannerisms of their principal spokesmen, were often even laughed at and despised; they grew disheartened; the less intellectually honest, vainer and less informed, like Alexander Jonas, Julius Grunzig, Herman Schlueter and others, imputed their failure, not, as in fact, to their own shortcomings, but, to use their own words, to the “hopeless stupidity and corruption of the American people”; and thus, by degrees, the “Party” shrank into social clubs—singing and drinking and card-playing societies, with an occasional outing when a member died, and periodical celebrations in which thrilling speeches were delivered by themselves to themselves.

While this development was going on, there were others setting in also. Years ago

the earnings of Labor were higher; a thrifty mechanic, who did not object to pinching himself some, could lay by money in bank. With the development of the capitalist system, earnings declined, savings became harder to make and jobs rarer to get.

Driven out of the shop by improved machinery and concentrating capital, the workingmen with savings in bank fell back upon that, and started small stores, in short rebounded into the middle class. One of the results of that—the seeming increase of the middle class—stumped the unscientific mind: the German Socialist, Edward Bernstein, concluded Marx was wrong, and the vulgar economists everywhere started new songs on the beauties of capitalism. Another result—the one we are here concerned with—was the changing of the angle of vision of the former workingman, who had become bourgeois. Speaking only a few years ago of the intellectual decline of the German Social Democracy, August Bebel referred to the numerous workingmen in Germany, who, being victimized by reason of their political activity, had to be provided with small stores by the German Party, and, with their change of class interests, had slid off from their pristine clear-cut radicalism. The economic development of capitalism here, above referred to, that caused workingmen with deposits to become small traders, wrought a like change in them. The change told strongly among certain German workingmen.

There is a third development that needs mention. It is akin to the one last considered. The worker, who had some savings, being thrown on the street by machinery, could fall back upon his savings and become bourgeois; the worker, who had none, stood on the ragged edge of the abyss of Labor-Fakirism. Into that abyss fell not a few. Their unions became reactionary “pure and simple”: all sense of solidarity vanished; there was no longer a question of organizing and protecting the working class; the union became a means for those in it to get a job by and to put others out of their jobs; and finally it ripened into an engine of capitalism, sold to the politicians by the leading fakirs.

Now, then, all these interests—the German Labor Fakir, the German bourgeois ex-workingmen and the singing, etc., society tired-out Socialist—clustered in this city around and centered in a German paper that, sailing under the name of Socialism, was, from its inception, essentially a practical business enterprise for its own employés. That paper was the *New Yorker Volkszeitung*.

The fishiness of the *Volkszeitung* was too rank to be concealed. Accordingly, about fourteen years ago, the “Party” element that was sound in mind and heart, found it

advisable to establish a bona fide Party organ in the German language—*Der Sozialist*, subsequently named *Vorwärts*, a weekly paper—and later managed to acquire another weekly, in the English language, named the *Workmen's Advocate*. The editors of these two papers, Rosenberg and Bushe, respectively, were like the rest of the “Party’s” national officers, weak, insignificant men, wholly unfit for their responsible posts. Nevertheless, with all their unfitness, Rosenberg and Bushe, saw a glimmer of light. A political party that is not in politics struck even them as absurd. Accordingly, ten years ago, they began to pull for political action. This was to immediately run foul of the *Volkszeitung*. The political field as a purifier: it makes havoc of false pretences. The *Volkszeitung* was the “organ of the S.L.P.” in this city. More or less labored articles on Socialism did it no harm, and an occasional good word for the then misnomer of a Socialist Labor Party was profitable: without these monkeyshines the paper could not, as it was doing, drain the Party of funds—funds drained under the pretence of “upholding the Party press.” That was all right. But actual politics, the putting up of an S.L.P. ticket and thus “hostilizing customers and advertisers” (AMONG THE LATTER OF WHOM POLITICAL CANDIDATES OF THE CAPITALIST PARTIES APPEARED not infrequently)—that was a horse of a different color, that would not do!

The *Volkszeitung* forthwith began to nag at the then editors of the Party organs. Rosenberg and Bushe, being the light weights they were, allowed themselves to be angered, and finally driven into a preposterous, wholly untenable and mischievous position. Having got them there, and thus isolated from the rest of the “Party” members, whom the deep villainy of the *Volkszeitung* intrigue escaped, the *Volkszeitung* crowd rose in self-righteous indignation. “Something had to be done quick”; “the Party had to be saved”; and more of such cant, until the “Party” membership having been seasoned by such a campaign of perfidy, the *Volkszeitung* crowd found it safe to carry out their scheme. One night they broke into the Party’s premises, took the two papers and all their belongings; sacked the two editors, and bounced the National Executive Committee.—And that was the end of that, in 1889.

Ten years have rolled by since,—ten years equivalent to fifty. The very necessity that the *Volkszeitung*, together with its disreputable appendages, was under to disguise its real purpose behind a false issue, left it uncovered against the real danger that it had sought to escape—POLITICAL ACTION BY THE S.L.P.

At the same time that the affairs of ’89 were going on in the “Party,” a Socialist movement, to the manner born, was being throbbled into existence by the throbs of

the nation itself. That movement went into the existing S.L.P., and transformed it. The very next year it unfurled its banner in the political field and held it. The *Volkszeitung* element was defeated. They valiantly sought to accommodate themselves to the inevitable, but could not; bankruptcy began to stare the *Volkszeitung* in the face; every year that passed made their element's position more unbearable: in front, the accelerated development of capital rendered the Labor Fakir and the tax-paying small trader more and more desperate, while the magnificent progress of the Party, with its increasing revolutionary ardor, was burning them in the rear. For some time the foul interests of ten years ago had been plotting to ease their straits; their manoeuvres to nag the Party's officers into blunders suffered shipwreck one after the other, and were turned upon them; then, all else proving unavailable, they staked their all upon a headlong coup that should strangle the Party—and failed ignominiously. Self-pilloried before the membership of the whole country as raw-boned violators of the Party constitution; beaten back, in the battle of the 10th instant, from the Party's premises that they now again sought to capture by surprise and violence—all as narrated in last week's issue; and subsequently outgeneraled in their attempts to starve the Party and bar it from the Post Office, they are to-day, July, '99, a physically and morally shattered crew.

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The year '99 is ten years later than '89. The S.L.P. is no longer a social club located mainly in New York. Within the last ten years its inspired apostles and its press have, with words of fire, cast abroad the rejuvenating spark, kindled the flame of class-consciousness in America, and planted the standard of the Social Revolution in the land. The S.L.P. has become a Party, indeed; it has leaped the boundaries of the city and State; it spread out North, South and West, and now extends from Ocean to Ocean, honored, respected, feared, over 80,000 strong.

In 1899, the S.L.P. is no longer the concern that can be bagged by the canaille of capitalist society.

[Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.](#)

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