

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 1, NO. 24.

NEW YORK, TUESDAY, JULY 24, 1900

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

POLITICAL ST. VITUS DANCE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

The Republicans have started in this city what is nothing else than a political St. Vitus' Dance.

In several parts of town, at the hour of noon, and in a properly advertised place, a "speaker" (God save the mark!) and two or three Salvation Army-sort of singers assemble with a score or two of minor office holders. The speaker speaks his piece, lauding McKinley and carefully vaulting over all the iniquities of his iniquitous administration; the score or two of office-holders applaud; then the singers take the stand and the lead, and the mob starts singing patriotic and other emotional hymns. The noise attracts passers-by. Many stray in to find out. The impressionable ones are affected not unlike the way such people are affected at revival camp-meetings: they join; clap their hands in rhythm; draw larger crowds, from among whom fresh accessions of emotional natures are drawn; and presently hysteria reigns supreme. The whole crowd is behaving as if seized with St. Vitus' dance.

A significant style of campaign agitation this is!

In these days of Roman Empire decline of ours, when the vertigo is seizing the ruling class, and the masses must be attuned to the song their masters play, the phenomena of the days of declining Rome turn up one by one. History is repeating itself. But the repetition is not monotonous. The tune is the same, but the key and the instrument through which it is now played are different. In this difference lies much that is worth noting; but much more that is encouraging.

Passing by the difference between the gorgeous feasts and shows with which the Roman proletariat was entranced, and the shabby hysterics with which modern Capitalism seeks to fascinate the American proletariat into impotence, the marked difference between now and then is the role played in society by the proletariat of old and the proletariat of to-day. The Roman proletariat was a menial class, fed from the table of the Roman lord; the American proletariat is a working class upon

whom the capitalist lord feeds. The Roman proletariat was supported by the Roman rulers; the modern proletariat supports with its labor the ruling class of to-day. In this difference lies a whole world.

Out of bacchanalian orgies and popular hysterics, that old Roman society used to keep itself on top, nothing but a social cataclysm could ensue, with the barbarian at the gates to profit thereby. A fed mass of menials has not in its composition the germ of social reconstruction. Not so to-day. The modern proletariat is no menial class; it is a working class. In its composition there is latent the germ of social reconstruction. Accordingly, the hysterics with which it is sought to palsy his striking arm will be of no avail at this juncture in the history of the human race.

The St. Vitus' Dance performances, initiated by the politically ruling element of the economic ruling class of to-day, is, accordingly, not, as in the days of ancient Rome, the death rattle of a whole nation, it is the death rattle of a ruling class only, the premonitions of the birth of a new social system—the Socialist Republic, where, the means of production being owned by all, all who work shall enjoy life, and all who can, but won't work, shall die.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded May 2005