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EDITORIAL

A TELL-TALE PHENOMENON.

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There is a certain news item that, since election, has been quite frequent in “labor” and “reform” papers. It is items conveying the news of papers that have dropped their former economic or political affiliations and have come out as “Social Democratic papers.” These papers were all in the “reform” movement, more or less pronouncedly. By actual count on a tally-sheet there are now nine of these converts and more seem to be coming. They surely will.

The fact is taken hold of by the Debsites and the Kangaroos. They are parading it about as a sign of increasing strength. Fact is that few symptoms are more significant of assured downfall than these very “conversions.”

The role of the press, and all that thereby hangs, is a matter of no slight importance. It deserves a study that is not usually given it.

The press is a powerful engine,—for the side that controls it. This latter qualification seems to be wholly overlooked by most people. Not so by the working class organized in the Socialist Labor Party. The question of who, in a conflict, controls a paper is the only question that will determine the side that the paper will benefit. Hence, the Socialist Labor Party, with a narrowness that renders it intolerable to all schemers or visionaries, tolerates no paper as an organ that it does not own wholly, whose continued loyalty, accordingly, it can not guarantee.

Not infrequently one hears allusions to the private ownership of the Republican press, and its effectiveness in the cause of abolitionism. Drawing a parallel from this fact, the strictness of the Socialist Labor Party position on the subject is condemned by the “reformers” very generally as suicidal.

It is essential to all historic parallel that allowance be made for circumstances. A match will not always produce an explosion: thrown into water, it will be extinguished. With the abolition issue, the private ownership of an abolition paper raised no danger to the abolition cause: the guns of the paper ran no risk of being turned against abolitionism, even though in private hands, for the simple reason

that economic power lay on the side of abolitionism. The conflict was between the remnant of feudalism and capitalism. The sceptre of economic rule had passed into the hands of the capitalist. The feudal foe had nothing to bribe the editor on the capitalist side with. For a time these were bribed with Presidencies or the lure of Presidencies; but presently even this was made impossible by the increasing power of capitalism. A privately owned abolition paper was, accordingly, a paper owned by capitalism, and was safe. But how now?

A feature, a very striking feature, of the pending Social Revolution is the complete difference, in point of economic power, between the class that is to put through this revolution and the successive classes that put through previous revolutions. At all previous revolutions, the revolutionary class had gained economic preponderance; at this revolution, the revolutionary class, the working class, is essentially a class stripped of all economic power: it is a propertyless class. It goes without saying that the loyalty of the individual who stands on the side of such a class, would stand on very slippery ground, unless he stood under direct control of the organization of that class. Accordingly, self-elected editors, and private owners of a paper that assails the ruling class, are guns in doubtful hands. Experience has shown that they have been bought out in job lots.

The Peffer element, four years ago, silenced the bulk of the more radical Populist press by simple purchase. It is an open secret that Republican money supported the middle-of-the-road press this year to hurt Bryan. In the Labor Movement itself, instances are thick as pie of papers that started with the best intentions of the owner, presently found it hard to live without advertising patronage, and, to get this, were forced to trim to the class interests that they had started to combat. For a living, they became traitors. The Schenectady, N.Y., *Toiler*, is a striking illustration.

What is happening with the Debserie is a tell-tale phenomenon. The more private concerns start papers as organs of the Social Democracy, the greater is the danger for that body. Either the Social Democracy must wink at the lapses inseparable from such papers, and then it will rush to its destined perdition all the faster; or, if it don't, then will it be denounced as "narrow and intolerant" by these "Socialist" editors for revenue only, and its downfall will be equally prompt: the farce of the pretence that a second Socialist party is needed would become too transparent to take in any but idiots.

On either side the much boasted-about increase of the Social Democratic press

points to a germ of sure death. Already this “new Socialist party” has quite enough of these germs in the make-up of its press; a rush of such germs will finish it up all the quicker.

Like the scorpion that carries within it the poison that kills it, wrongful and wrong-headed movements either bring that poison along with them or attract it obedient to their true instinct.

The ways of Providence may be inscrutable, but they are unerring.

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

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