

EDITORIAL

SENATOR BAILEY'S DEFINITION.

By DANIEL DE LEON

SENATOR Bailey from Texas delivered in the Senate a speech that, as most of the speeches delivered at this session of Congress, was intended for campaign uses. The Senator, being a Democrat, sought to furnish his own party with campaign arguments; being a man of acknowledged talent and probity, the maxims he laid down may be considered basic with the Democracy. It is well to look at these maxims, at least at one of them.



JOSEPH WELDON BAILEY (1862-1929)

In endeavoring to define the scope of government the Senator said:

“We (the Democracy) teach that the Government ought to leave the people free to make themselves both prosperous and happy.”

For one thing, the principle is one that no Democratic legislator observes.

To “leave the people free,” means hands off by the Government. Would Senator Bailey favor the abolition of the law that deprives people of the right to enforce a debt contracted by a magistrate upon his salary? He would not. Magistrates’ exemption on that score is considered essential to public policy. Would he abolish the law that protects women, sailors and children in a number of cases, holding them free from certain obligations that they may have contracted? He would not. The theory of the law exempting them is that, due to their condition, they are subject to imposition. No need of multiplying examples. Those quoted are enough to prove that the theory of government, as enunciated by Senator Bailey is defectively enunciated. In fact, it is a contradiction in terms to use “government”

and “freedom” in one breath in any such definition. The very idea of “government” presupposes and starts from the principle that absolute individual freedom means collective misery, due to the inevitable result of the tyranny of the mightiest. Government restricts freedom, and justly so.

So understanding the question, the principle of Government is not “to leave the people free,” but to prevent, or to safeguard the people against, being enslaved. The science of government is, accordingly, pivoted on a principle wholly different from that enunciated by Senator Bailey. The principle upon which it is pivoted is one that can not be determined by abstract ideas, but where the abstract idea, the pursuit of happiness, is conditioned upon material facts so must government shape itself. No rhetoric has any place in the premises.

What, then, are the material facts surrounding the people to-day? The overwhelming majority of the people are to all intents and purposes as much in need of protection as sailors, women and children. The lack of the necessary capital with which to hold their own in the competitive struggle for existence compels rafts of people to enter into disastrous contracts with the employer class “in consideration of employment;” it compels them to submit to imposition; it compels them to lead the lives of drudges, as completely secluded from the glories of the century as if they lived several centuries back;—in short, the material fact of capitalism prevents the pursuit of happiness. National government must consider the fact, and considering, and ever keeping in mind its mission, the safeguarding of the people against being enslaved, it must—upon the same principle that it provides against footpads, etc., etc., restricting the freedom of these marauders—provide such methods and establish such forms as shall block the capitalist class in its tyrannous course against the working class. The government that does not can not be said to be one that “leaves the people to make themselves prosperous and happy.”

And that is a feature of the Democratic party, in which strawberry mark its twinship with the Republican party is recognizable; and wherefore every one with eyes to see and brains to understand what he sees will turn his back upon both and upon all the parties that fuse with either, and rank himself under the banner of the Socialist Labor Party.

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