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EDITORIAL

THE “SEIDENBERG SPECTER”.

By DANIEL DE LEON

AN event there took place in this city, just about eight years ago, that marks a leading epoch in the history of the American Labor Movement. With that event an old page was turned down, a new page turned up. The event is in the nature of a beacon, whose light, thitherto held dark, suddenly, the blinds being shattered, flashed out into the surrounding gloom, and illumined what long had been obscure. The event is known to careful students of the Movement as the “Seidenberg Specter”. As time proceeds, the luminous, and at once avenging, Specter grows in luster. An unguarded article in the *Volkszeitung* of the 10th instant, purporting to deal with the Question of Unionism, and, of course, hostile to the I.W.W., furnishes an exceptionally welcome opportunity to review the occurrence, and thereby derive the fulness of the instruction that it conveys.

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In the course of the article referred to the *Volkszeitung* says:

“The S.T. & L.A. took at strikes the places of striking workingmen belonging to the hostile organization, as, for instance, in the Seidenberg affair, where it even engaged itself with the bosses to furnish them scabs.”

The Seidenberg affair created at the time a considerable stir. The craft Union traffickers in strikes and pets of the *Volkszeitung* Corporation were stirred as they never had been stirred before. They rushed to that paper with their wails and versions. These were greedily received and published. The paper’s columns at the time ran over with such “correspondence”. Surely, if the S.T. & L.A. “took the places of strikers at Seidenberg”, mention of the fact could not, at the time have escaped these righteously indignant craft Unionists and *Volkszeitung* pets. Aye, had they been—besides the knaves that they are—long-headed enough to foresee that the

specter which they conjured up was not one that could be easily laid, they surely would not have been above inventing that lie also, and charging the S.T. & L.A. with having "taken the places of strikers at Seidenberg". Their ignorance of the Movement being, however, of a piece with their knavery, they considered the aspirations after bona fide Unionism to be buried. Thus it never occurred to them to invent the further lie of "taking strikers' places". Accordingly, no such charge was made by them, at that time, in the *Volkszeitung* or elsewhere; nor can the *Volkszeitung* produce, as it is hereby challenged to produce, a single line from their plentiful correspondence in its own columns that bears out the concrete charge it now makes that S.T. & L.A. men "took the places of strikers at Seidenberg". If the issue were merely to convict the *Volkszeitung* of labor fakir mendacity out of its own mouth, we would rest here. But the issue of the Seidenberg Specter is of vastly greater import.

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The facts in the case were these: The Pioneer Cigarmakers' Union (S.T. & L.A., No. 141) was organized at No. 98 avenue C, in this city, on February 10, 1898. The meeting was an open one. The organization took place amid the loud denunciations of "Scab!" uttered by Messrs. Morris Braun, Rudolf Modest, David Heimerdinger and about ten other approved henchmen of Gompersism, who vainly did their level best to break up the meeting. The new body consisted wholly of unorganized men, several of whom worked at the Seidenberg factory. They promptly carried an agitation on the floor on which they worked, which also consisted wholly of unorganized men, and soon had almost the whole floor within the pale of the organization. The floor below was occupied by the Gompers Union of cigarmakers. The Pioneer Union men were indulging in visions of co-operation from and approval by the older Union in the former's{,} so far, successful labors of bringing the unorganized workers into the organization, when one fine morning, a few weeks later, March 14, on their way to work, they suddenly ran up against the Gompers Union pickets who informed them "the shop is on strike". Astonished thereat though the "Pioneers" were, having had no intimation on the subject, they, notwithstanding they had not been consulted, offered to co-operate with the Gompers Union the

moment they found that, with the exception of their own floor, the rest of the factory was on strike "against a reduction in wages", as they were informed—and, TO A MAN, THEY STAYED OUT OF THE SHOP. Their offer of co-operation was spurned; they were called "scabs"; a "settlement" with the employer was speedily made by the Gompers authorities; as two members of the Gompers Union subsequently informed the public over their own signatures, the "settlement" left them just where they were before the strike, if not worse off; but the "settlement" provided that THE "PIONEER" CIGARMAKERS WERE TO BE LOCKED OUT. In other words, the strike was not against the employer, it was against the S.T. & L.A. for what?—FOR HAVING ORGANIZED THE UNORGANIZED. For this "crime" they were called "scabs". And the "crime" was held to be so harmful to Gompers Unionism, that the latter was willing to pay, and did pay, the employer with a "settlement" injurious to the wages and conditions of its own men, in consideration of his throwing out the Alliance men.

Great was the jubilation in the camp of craft Unionism. "The Pioneers are crushed!" ran the slogan. If the "Pioneers were crushed" they were "crushed" only in the sense that the workingmen of Russia were "crushed" on the "Bloody Sunday" of January 22, 1905. As on the latter date the event rent the veil that had previously mystified the Russian proletariat concerning the nature of their "Little Father", so on the former date there was rent in America the veil that had long concealed a fact not dreamed of before, at least never before understood.

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The Labor Movement of America came out of the Seidenberg affair with its wisdom-tooth cut. The language held by the craft Union officers on the subject of the unorganized was and is intended to convey the idea that the craft Union fain would have the unorganized in its fold, but that these, owing to some spirit of perversity, refuse to join and stay out. Fresh upon the memory of all must be the statement of President Perkins of the Gompers cigarmakers' Union, impudently advanced over his own signature in a letter to the *Miners' Magazine* of last October 19, that it is false that his Union refuses to organize the stogie workers. Perkins stated explicitly that his Union "is now and always has been ready, willing and anxious to organize

the stogie makers of this country and affiliate them with the Cigar Makers' International Union." Fresh upon the memories of all must be the letter of J.L. Frank, the Secretary of the United Stogie and Cigar Makers' League, L.A. 1374, K. of L. of Pittsburg, Pa., which appeared in the same *Miners' Magazine* of the following November 9, answering and refuting Perkins, and convicting him with facts, acts and figures of deliberate mendacity. Finally and upon the same subject, fresh upon the minds of all must be the letter of Trautmann in the *Miners' Magazine* of December 7, where, quoting from the constitution of Perkins' own Union, Trautmann showed that the conditions demanded by Perkins' Union for the admission of stogie makers were SUCH AS TO MAKE STOGIE-MAKING IMPOSSIBLE. The Perkins claim was demolished; the claimant pilloried.

The unorganized are not unorganized because they will not organize; they are unorganized because CRAFT UNIONISM REFUSES TO ORGANIZE THEM. By means of a score of devious devices—high initiation fees, high dues, trumped up fines, excessive assessments, apprentice regulations, "constitutional" pitfalls, "examinations", etc., etc.,—craft Unionism bars the bulk of the working class from or forces them out of the Union. This is a fact of prime importance. Not until it is known and fully grasped can the Labor Movement progress. The Perkins false pretense, fully plucked and exposed, supplements the discovery made by the S.T. & L.A. at Seidenberg's. That discovery is that ALL ATTEMPT TO ORGANIZE THE UNORGANIZED CAN NOT CHOOSE BUT BE IMMEDIATELY RESENTED BY CRAFT UNIONISM AS AN ATTACK UPON ITS OWN VITALS. No organization of the unorganized is, accordingly, imaginable that will not forthwith draw upon itself all the fires of craft Unionism. This ugly fact was uncovered at Seidenberg's. The conclusion that the fact pointed its index finger at is that CRAFT UNIONISM IS A CONSPIRACY AGAINST THE WORKING CLASS. The S.T. & L.A. was in the dark upon this fact when that body was launched. It uncovered the ulcer unknowingly, as Columbus discovered America unknowingly. In uncovering, having been wholly unprepared, the S.T. & L.A. was ripped up. But the knowledge it had acquired became public property. That knowledge rose like a spectre—the SEIDENBERG SPECTER—over the head of craft Unionism, dogged and pursued it, and is now pursuing it to its destruction. The knowledge thus gained fructified the roots of the

lustly tree that has grown into the I.W.W. How infinitely fuller the information is with which the I.W.W. was equipped, when it was launched in 1905, than was the information upon this head with which the Movement was equipped in 1896, when the S.T. & L.A. was launched, may be judged from the utter failure that has accompanied the recent yell of "Scab!", raised by the Gompers capmaker fakirs against the unorganized capmakers whom the I.W.W. organized—almost an exact repetition of the Seidenberg cry of "Scab!" Well did Eugene V. Debs, referring to this very cry that "has gone up in New York" against the I.W.W., sum up the situation by characterizing as a "grafter, who sees his booty vanishing" the individual whose peculiar process of reasoning quickly converts into a scab every worker who has made the experience that the leaders of these craft Unions have betrayed the working class, and "in collusion with their bosses, have a mortgage on their [the rank and file's] bodies and souls".

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It is no accident that the Volkszeitung Corporation has reverted, of all affairs, to "the Seidenberg Affair". It is a well known fact, taught by criminology—Edgar Allan Poe calls it and illustrates it thrillingly as "The Imp of the Perverse"—that malefactors are driven by a morbid inclination to haunt the localities of their crimes, whereby they frequently give opportunity for their capture. The "Seidenberg Affair" records one of the darkest deeds of felony against the American Labor Movement perpetrated by the Volkszeitung Corporation in pursuit of its own petty and nasty private interests. Yet inscrutable are the ways of Providence. It needed just such an act of felony to teach the militant Socialists of the land that to organize the unorganized is "scabbery" to craft Unionism. It likewise needed just such an "Imp of the Perverse" to lead the Volkszeitung Corporation back to the "Affair", so as to give opportunity for the capture of the felon and thereby thoroughly ventilate the issue.

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