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ONE CENT.

CORRESPONDENCE

## AS TO POLITICS.

*(By Arturo Giovannitti, New York.)*

I HAVE read very attentively the articles by Comrades Wagner and Vasilio in *The People* of Tuesday, and the few remarks by Comrade De Leon, and, as a result, I should like to give my humble opinion and try to answer the still unanswered questions of *The People's* Editor.

It seems to me that both Sandgren and De Leon have given a wrong definition of what they term “the political activity of the working class,” an error which has been but partly redressed when they drew a line between ballot and agitation. Yet altho Sandgren and his followers want no politics, they want a revolution, and whilst De Leon excommunicates the ballot, he still persists in having an S.L.P. ticket on the very same ballot. The first forgets that a revolution must be essentially political before it can be anything else, the latter is a little afraid to reconduct the revolutionary method on the straight road of the “outside political action,” to wit, the general strike and the revolt.

The question is not whether we should bother about politics or not, but how we should conduct our political fight: should we remain even temporarily within the orbit of legality, or should we get out of it altogether and enforce our rights and will with new means and weapons adequate to the opportunity of the historical moment which we cross? In Europe, to define this legal fight, for to be peaceful it must be legal, we have coined a new word: Parliamentarism—and all the question, according to me, lies in that word, that is to say, the political struggle of the working class within the capitalist state machine.

Does then Comrade De Leon mean parliamentarism when he speaks of a peaceful method of solving the Social Question? If not, where is then the necessity of having a ticket in the field so far as we don't expect and don't want to send our “Honorable Comrades” to Washington?

I shall consider only the first hypothesis and endeavor to prove as briefly as I

can that parliamentary action, to use an imported word, spells simply reform and not revolution, in the real historic sense of the word. Parliament is a bourgeois institution, the cornerstone of capitalism, as it is the very same organ with which the republic struck the monarchy and through which capitalism emerged from feudalism. Previous and through the insurrectional phases of the French Revolution, the rising bourgeois knew that it could not fight feudalism with the legal weapons that were then possible, and realized that in order to transform society it needed first the absolute destruction of the existing State, and therefore forced and developed a new form of state that had nothing common with the old one, i.e., the Parliament. It must be so of the proletariat as it was of the bourgeoisie. "The proletariat does not escape the common rule of all the revolutionary classes that preceded it. It also forms itself an organ for the representance of its collective interests. This organ is the labor organization, the trade syndicate. Not a class truly revolutionary can think that the use of legal machines of the existing regime can be enough to guarantee the collective interests. It must form itself its own organ and strive to make it prevail on those of the existing society." (Labriola.) In other words a class that really intends to fulfill its historical function must be revolutionary, not in aim, but in methods and means. The task of revolution is not to construct the new society but to demolish the old one and therefore its first aim should be at the complete destruction of the existing state so as to render it absolutely powerless to re-act and re-establish itself. When revolution fails to do so, the old regime may absorb some of the new ideas but will always remain, as it was the case in Italy and Germany and as it will happen in Russia if the working class does not strike violently at the root of the monarchy and forcibly impose its own political organ both against the Czar and the Duma. In other words, when the revolutionary process gets off the track of violence and insurrection without having achieved its destructive function and comes to argue and discuss within the circle of legality, when it does not strike at the existing political machine from the outside, but comes to bore from within, it utterly fails to its historical mandate and does nothing but a mere act of reform. "To use the organs of the existing society to transform the same society means to collaborate to defend and guarantee it, to wit, do a work openly anti-revolutionary." (Sorel.)

Consequently, if the S.L.P. goes to Congress, it means that it recognizes its usefulness, and in so doing it will co-operate to its perpetuation and give the state,

and therefore capitalism, a longer lease of life. Therefore, it is not only an organization with a revolutionary aim that we need, but one ready to follow the revolutionary process in not only a new ideal, but a new action to realize the same. By this, it is evident that such an organization cannot and must not employ legal and lawful methods, neither can it hope in *{sic}* a peaceful solution, as the simple fact that a class is revolutionary implies that it is outlaw. This, Comrade De Leon does not discuss, neither does he answer arguments with arguments and facts with facts. He does not say that such an organization would not lead the working class to victory, but he is simply worried as to how we are going to recruit it if we abandon the idea of a possible peaceful solution of the Social Question.

This peaceful solution could be attained only thru parliamentary action, but, again, if capitalism has open{ed} its holy of holiest to an enemy class that wants not less than its head, it means that it is no more afraid of the proletariat when the latter is willing to visit capitalism {at} home and talk matters over. My enemy is my enemy and I fear him until he waits for me outside with a gun or a stiletto, but when he comes in and sits down to expose his reasons I cease to fear him and the whole quarrel is liable to end with a merry supper and abundant glasses of wine with relative toasts and madrigals. How can we believe that even with the most rigid logic and with the fear of a strong revolutionary organization we could convince the master class to give itself up into the hands of the rival class that knows no christian charity and will not commute the death sentence of capitalism? Are we then to understand that capitalism will commit suicide rather than to face the I.W.W. executioner? Is there any example in history that can justify such a sweet dream of peace and love? Not even the holy father, who believes in turning the left cheek when somebody slaps his right one, ever refrained from the sweet help of the hangman and other christian accessories any time he saw his throne and holy purse attacked. Suicide is not the act of a normal being, neither have we any reasons yet to believe that the capitalist class will get crazy all at once in the last moment.

It is then by main force and thru violence only that we can transform society, but collective, organized violence, not as it is now in Russia but as it was in this country fifty years ago. It is not a conspiracy but an open and loyal fight, not an assault but a regular duel, and it will not be a riotous outbreak but a good and proper civil war, if you wish to call it so. If an act of Congress can prevent all that

and yield to the working class the land and the means of production and distribution, so much the better, but this is their business, not ours. How can we get the men together for this glorious proletarian epopee? Well, how did the International get them? How is the I.W.W. getting them? How did we build Local 199, Tailors' Industrial Union, the strongest and most numerous in the city, where not even once was election day mentioned, altho every member is fully acquainted with the take and hold clause? HOW? Why by going to them and telling them all about it without considering them either tigers nor rabbits, but men who, once having understood can prove that they are right in the good old American fashion, and put up a good fist fight when words and arguments fail.

Are then the S.P. and the S.L.P. so necessary to the I.W.W. that without the former the latter could not exist? Are the polls the only means to convince them to unite, to go to strike, to resist, and to press their action so on the political field (political agitation) that those from above will let something drop every once in a while before the whole edifice tumbles down?

Why should we speak to the working class of a peaceful settlement when probably not ONE of the S.L.P. members believes in it? Fifty vacant seats in Congress will frighten capitalism more than fifty "Honorable" Socialists sitting there and doing nothing, and if we must use the ballot for something let us use it for the sole purpose of emptying their ranks. The future of Socialism lies only in the general strike, not merely a quiet political strike, but one that once started should go fatally to its end, i.e., armed insurrection and the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. It may be objected that it is yet too early to throw the alarm of parliamentarism in America, but the fact is that the Socialist movement has degenerated so in all European countries on account of parliamentarism, that it would be simply foolish not to take advantage of their lesson and follow another road. Let us not strike out the political clause from the I.W.W. constitution, but let us understand that the I.W.W. must develop itself as the new legislature and executive body of the land, undermine the existing one and gradually absorb the functions of the state until it can entirely substantiate it through the only means it has: The Revolution.

[First of all let the fact be once more recorded that this week's opponent of the S.L.P. posture, like each and every one who preceded him, leaves unanswered the

practical question put by *The People* at the beginning of this discussion—how can the ranks of the I.W.W., of the revolutionary army intended to take and hold the means of production, recruit the necessary forces for that eventual and final act of the revolution, if it starts by rejecting the civilized method of settling disputes, offered by the political platform, and plants itself instead upon the principle of physical force exclusively? Surely this is a question worth answering. It is essential to a common understanding. Why is the question persistently evaded? Every evasion thereof can only be construed as an evidence of inability to answer it; consequently, as demonstration of the soundness of the practical principle that it implies. The demonstration is only made all the stronger by the indulgence in vast digressions, and the taking up of space on side matters.

In the instance of this week's correspondent the evasion is all the more marked. Giovannitti starts with the admission that the question put by *The People* has not been answered. Indeed, it is for that very reason that he asks for space to "try to answer the still unanswered questions of *The People's* Editor." Does he answer that question? With not a word.

Or is this sentence, perchance, an answer: "How can we get the men together for this glorious proletarian epopee? Well, how did the International get them?"—The sentence implies that the International did get the men together for this glorious proletarian epopee. That's news to us. If the International had "got the men together for this glorious proletarian epopee" there would be no capitalist class to-day to overthrow; the epopee would have been enacted. That it has not been enacted, that Giovannitti recognizes the epopee has yet to be enacted, is ample refutation to the implied claim that the International "got the men together."

Or is, perchance, this other sentence the answer promised by Giovannitti: "How can we get the men together for this glorious proletarian epopee? Well . . . how is the I.W.W. getting them?"—This sentence is of a piece with that analyzed last week from the correspondence of two St. Louis opponents. That sentence does not "answer" *The People's* question; the sentence confirms *The People's* position; the sentence is fatal to the posture of *The People's* opponents. This discussion was initiated by Sandgren's proposition "to strike out all reference to politics in the I.W.W. preamble." Upon that *The People's* question, re-stated above, was put, and the contention both of Sandgren and of all who sided with him, this week's correspondent included, was and is, logically enough from their premises, that

political agitation should be excluded as harmful and unnecessary. No opponent of *The People's* position can quote the successful agitation of the I.W.W., whose platform has the political clause, as an evidence that the ranks of the I.W.W. can be recruited with the necessary numbers upon the principle of physical force only.

Giovannitti, accordingly, leaves unanswered the question he promised to answer; and strangest of all he closes by opposing Sandgren's proposition to expunge the political clause from the I.W.W. platform! Inextricable are the contradictions that this week's opponent tangles himself in.

We might stop here. The gist of the above letter is disposed of. Nevertheless our correspondent incurs a number of collateral errors that we trust he will thank us for calling his attention to. And this we do for reason of the knowledge that frequently it happens that collateral errors are responsible for central ones. So long as the former becloud the mind, the latter remain unperceived.

Giovannitti says: "A class that really intends to fulfill its historical function must be revolutionary, not in aim but in methods and means." This sentence sins doubly against social science. Its first sinfulness lies in the use of the expression "revolutionary methods and means." There is no such thing as "revolutionary means" or "methods." Means and methods may be good or bad, wise or unwise, timely or premature—"revolutionary" never. Physical force, the revolutionary method and means meant by our correspondent, is by no means essentially revolutionary, it may be archly reactionary. If physical force were the test of "revolution" the palm for revolutionariness would have to be awarded to {the} Czar's establishment. Unconsciously Giovannitti himself acts obedient to this view of the matter. If he did not he would not now be in the revolutionary camp of the I.W.W.; he would have fallen in with the Sherman crew of reactionists who resorted to physical force. The second sinfulness of the sentence lies in its first part, the notion that the function of the proletariat "must be revolutionary, NOT IN AIM, but in methods and means.{" In other words, that the aim is a negligible quantity in determining the revolutionary or non-revolutionary character of a body. Such a conception of Social evolution or of the march of human events is untenable. Marx well said that force has ever been the MIDWIFE of revolutions. According to our correspondent's idea of things, however, all that is needed for the birth of a child would be the midwife; the function of the father and the mother count for nothing. There is a violent clash of physical force now in progress in Russia. If physical force

were the test of “revolution” then both {of?} the contending sides would be revolutionists. We all know this is false. How do we all determine which is the side of revolution and which that of reaction? Why, by their respective AIMS.

This serious error on the part of Giovannitti leads to the following other error, which runs like a black warp through the woof of his argument. He says in one place: “Should we remain even temporarily within the orbit of LEGALITY”; in another place: “the LEGAL fight, for, to be peaceful it must be LEGAL”; again: “the use of LEGAL machines of the existing regime”; still in another place: “such an organization [the organization that we need] must not employ LEGAL and LAWFUL methods”; and so forth. The continuous iteration and re-iteration of the terms “legal,” “legality,” “lawful” betray a misconception of *The People’s* posture. Giovannitti will not find the words used once by *The People* in this discussion. *The People* is not troubled with the thought of “legality.” *The People* planted itself upon the principle of “civilization.” Giovannitti and the Editor of *The People* are civilized men. Being civilized men they are discussing the subject politely. Were the two a couple of barbarians they would have begun by breaking each other’s heads. Giovannitti’s confusion of thought in the matter is such that he has read “legal” for “civilized,” “legality” for “civilization,” and that has interfered with his understanding of *The People’s* arguments in this discussion, beginning with the answer to Sandgren where the principle of civilization was treated at large. Political action is the civilized, because it is the peaceful method of social debate and of ascertaining numbers. He who rejects that method places himself upon the barbarian plane, a plane where the capitalist class would be but too glad to see him, seeing that he thereby would give the capitalist class a welcome pretext to drop all regard for decency and resort to the terrorism that would suit it. But civilization is CIVILIZATION. It implies not only the effort for peace, but also the knowledge of the fact that Right without Might is a thing of air. Accordingly the civilized revolutionary organization proclaims the Right, demands it, argues for it, and willingly submits to the civilized method of polling the votes—AND IT ORGANIZES ITSELF WITH THE REQUISITE PHYSICAL FORCE IN CASE ITS DEFEATED ADVERSARY SHOULD RESORT TO THE BARBARIAN’S WAY OF ENFORCING HIS WILL. The civilized man answers force with force; the barbarian begins with force. “Civilization” not “legality” demands the political clause.

A third collateral error committed by Giovannitti happens in the passage in

which he quotes Labriola in support of what Labriola does not hold. Labriola belongs with the “Syndicalist” (Unionist) wing of what? Of the Socialist PARTY of Italy. The quotation from Labriola becomes a misquotation in the place where it occurs. It is perfectly sensible in connection with Labriola’s position, which is as exactly that of the S.L.P. as two positions in two different countries can be.

Finally a luminous insight is obtained into the loose methods of thought of our opponents by the following passage from Giovannitti’s letter: “Fifty vacant seats in Congress will frighten capitalism more than fifty ‘Honorable’ Socialists sitting there and doing nothing, and if we must use the ballot for something let us use it for the sole purpose of emptying their ranks,”—a notion that can only proceed from a mistaken comprehension of facts in the case. Even if the whole Working Class abstained from voting, there would be NOT ONE SINGLE SEAT VACANT, the capitalist candidates would then be elected unanimously by the capitalists themselves.

The theme of this discussion is serious. It should be approached, not with anger or preformed thoughts, but with a mind open to apprehend the facts and to reason from them.—EDITOR THE PEOPLE.]

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

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[slpns@slp.org](mailto:slpns@slp.org)