

**AS TO POLITICS: A DISCUSSION UPON
THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF
POLITICAL ACTION AND OF CLASS-
CONSCIOUS ECONOMIC ACTION,
AND THE URGENT NECESSITY OF BOTH**

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As to Politics: A Discussion upon the Relative Importance of Political Action and of Class-Conscious Economic Action, and the Urgent Necessity of Both by Olive M. Johnson & Daniel De Leon

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OLIVE M. JOHNSON & DANIEL DE LEON

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AS TO POLITICS

A Discussion upon the Relative Importance
of Political Action and of Class-Conscious Eco-
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THIRD EDITION

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Socialism is neither an aspiration of angels, nor a plot of devils. Socialism moves with its feet firmly planted on the ground, and its head not lost in the clouds; it takes Science by the hand, asks her to lead, and goes whithersoever she points. It does not take Science by the hand, saying: "I shall follow you to the end of the road if it please me." No! It takes her by the hands and says: "Whithersoever thou leadest, thither am I bound to go." The Socialists, consequently, move as intelligent men; we do not mutiny because, instead of having wings, we have arms, and can not fly as we would wish.

—DANIEL DE LEON.

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The Party carries on its work of education encouraged by the knowledge that some day, somehow, something is bound to rip. And then, at that crisis, when the people, who have allowed themselves to be misled from Mumbo Jumbo to Jumbo Mumbo, will be running around like chickens without a head, there will be one beacon light in the land burning as clear in that darkness as it is burning 'midst the clouds today; one beacon, whose steady light will serve as guide; whose tried firmness will inspire confidence; and whose rock-ribbed sides will serve as a natural point of rally from which to save civilization.

—DANIEL DE LEON.

PREFACE

The contents of the pamphlet which follows are discussions arising in 1906 from a timely topic. Discussions of this kind generally lose all interest when the topic in question is once disposed of. By peculiar circumstances the very "disposal" of this topic has made this discussion more alive than ever. The reason is the old one: Nothing is ever settled till it is settled right. When the I. W. W. in 1908 "settled" the question of its relation to politics by striking from its preamble "the political clause," it settled the question in a manner economically and historically unsuited to the conditions under which it is working and organizing, and that initial wrong has born a litter of evil consequences, so dark and foreboding as to constitute a positive danger to the wage working class of America. In view of the events of the last decade the clear, sound, and warning words of Daniel De Leon contained in these pages ring like a prophesy.

When the Industrial Workers of the World was launched in 1905, the amount of sound revolutionary union organization carried on among the masses was as yet perhaps insufficient to warrant the success of so great an organization. The demoralizing influence of Socialist party autonomy and "education" by "lying about Socialism" and teaching sentimental tommyrot instead of sound Socialism, had had more of a corroding influence upon the "Socialistic element" in this country than was generally understood or admitted at that time. The Socialist Labor Party influence was not strong enough to counteract this; the Party lacked sufficient forces and resources. But what the I. W. W. of 1905 lacked in sound knowledge it made up for in enthu-

siasm. The idea of unity of the working class on the economic field spread like wild-fire. Inspired by this new-found gospel, the I. W. W. opened wide its arms to every comer. The avowed anarchist, who for years had been an outcast from the Socialist family of most nations, was not slow to take advantage of the proffered re-adoption to grace.

It was not long before the evil influence of the anarchist within the ranks of the I. W. W. began to manifest itself. The half-baked "Socialistic" elements, shaving off from the S. P., proved plastic and easily molded material by their more cunning cousin. The struggle was on within the ranks between Socialist Industrial Unionism and Anarcho-Syndicalism. How much the "honest anarchist" was aided in this struggle by the agent provocateur, the industrial or political spy, shall probably never be known. Certain it is that the work of the latter was great. The I. W. W. was a beam in the capitalist eye from the beginning. Attacks were centered upon it, and as was only natural, the element of anarchy was instantaneously detected as the new organization's weakest spot.

The first open attack launched at the Socialist Labor Party—the element which formed the real tower of strength within and without the I. W. W.—came not from an avowed anarchist, but from one who was essentially an organization man, John Sandgren of San Francisco. This onslaught constitutes the opening letter of this discussion, the discussion of the wisdom of dropping the political clause. Daniel De Leon takes the negative. To Sandgren's aid against De Leon's powerful thrusts rush at once all shades of anti-politicals, covering the entire file of opinion clean through to such an anarchist as Arturo Giovannitti. De Leon fences with them all, worsts them all—in the discus-

sion. But concerning the organization there is a different story to tell. Anarchic ideas soon ran rampant, until in 1908 the anti-political elements conquered—by decidedly anarchic tactics—threw out the Socialist organization group and threw out the political clause after them.

From that time till within a few years ago the syndicalist I. W. W. has been enough in the public eye so that its escapades are pretty generally known. Utter scorn of the ballot and its "civilized method"; advocacy of "striking at the ballot-box with an ax"; staged "free-speech" fights which really constituted a mass intrusion upon the "sanctuary" of the jail; sneers at "laws" and "legal methods" but instantaneous appeals to the law when trouble arrived; strikes that were deliberately turned into local riots; open advocacy and practice of sabotage, destruction, vengeance and criminal anarchy, if necessary; the glorification of theft and murder; constant appeals to the standards and the tactics of the brute and the savage!—such was the brief, adventurous, and sensational career of the I. W. W., aided in it: downward march by the industrial spy and the agent provocateur.

The position taken by Daniel De Leon throughout this debate—a position that is not even scratched by a single one of the arrows the attacking pigmies shoot at him—is that the revolutionary union intending to take and hold the means of production can not recruit the necessary forces for the final act of the revolution if it starts by rejecting the civilized method of settling disputes, offered by the political platform, and instead plants itself upon the principle of physical force exclusively. De Leon held that if the I. W. W. abandoned the civilized method implied by the ballot it would sooner or later be forced either to give up its revolutionary