EDITORIAL

A DEVELOPMENT.

By DANIEL DE LEON

UNDER the above title we publish elsewhere in this issue an article that should be clipped and carefully preserved. It should be pasted in a scrap-book labeled “Sign-posts,” and containing only articles of this nature. They are sign-posts to warn the Working Class against the ominous figures that are bound to arise in their midst. The article supplements and throws light upon the series of articles, published in these columns, on the recent decision of the Supreme Court of the United States declaring the ten-hour law of this State unconstitutional. Finally, the article has the merit of coming, not from an adverse and prejudiced, but from a source friendly to Mr. Henry Weissmann, whose development it gives, from an officer of the Bakers’ Union, who managed to secure the ten-hour law during his incumbency, to a lawyer, who managed to get the boss-bakers to put in his hands the case that was to cause the declaration of that very ten-hour law unconstitutional.

In giving his antecedents to the capitalist press, Mr. Weissmann made certain misstatements and overlooked certain items which may not be of little importance to the understanding of his career as given by himself. We shall here correct the errors and supply the deficiencies.

Mr. Weissmann did not learn the trade of bakery in Germany, as the article says. He learned the trade in a San Francisco penitentiary, where he was confined for complicity in a dynamite conspiracy. Mr. Weissmann came out a baker. His knowledge of or liking for the trade was inferior to his liking for something easier. Accordingly, with whatever knowledge of the trade he possessed as a base, he joined the bakers’ organization; secured an office in it; and, about thirteen years ago, transferred the field of his activities to this city, where he became the Editor of the Bakers’ Journal, and leading transactor of the bakers’ business—the Fleischmann’s
yeast boycott among others.

Upon his arrival in New York, Mr. Weissmann sniffed around the Socialist Labor Party. The organization offered him no “field”; but he speedily drew to himself by elective affinity several members of the Party who, gifted with a scent less keen than himself, had drifted into the Party and discovered what he had scented in advance—that the “field” was not favorable for their operation. The ramshackle set of driftwood, consisting of one W.C. Owen, one John Steel, and two or three others, who had foregathered in this city from the four quarters of the world’s compass, gathered around Weissmann, and the bunch set up Gompers for their patron saint. It was the first “trouble” that the Socialist Labor Party experienced in the ’90s. The slogan against the Party was its Trades Union attitude. Owen, Weissmann and Steel, who became a reporter on the capitalist press, cannonaded the Socialist Labor Party with lampoons and with “reports” gotten up by Steel. Gompers and Gompersism was the beau ideal.

Weissmann flourished under boycotts and strikes; a central body of labor which he established against the then Central Labor Federation, a body closely allied to the Socialist Labor Party, was eventually dropped as no longer needed, and Weissmann himself dropped out of the Bakers’ Union, immediately blossoming forth as a boss-baker.

But Weissmann’s name did not vanish from the subsequent chronicles of the Labor Movement. It appeared almost continuously as the subject of the wrath of the bakers whom he now employed. One day it appeared conspicuously in a new connection. Within the week of the day on which Theodore Roosevelt was nominated for Governor of this State in 1898, a little lunch party was held by the candidate with two “leading representatives of Labor”—as the reports had it. Of these two “representatives of Labor,” Henry Weissmann was one, the other was a gentleman whose original name was something like Karkowinsky, but who is extensively known as Harry White, the then Secretary of the Garment Workers, subsequent co-member of Gompers on the Civic Federation, recently convicted of hiring scabs to break a garment workers’ strike in Chicago, and finally bounced by his own organization. That was the trio at that lunch.

The latest conspicuous appearance of Weissmann in print is now. He had
become a lawyer. He tells us himself, in the article referred to, that when the boss-baker Lockner was convicted in this State for violating the ten-hour law, the State Association of Master Bakers “came to him,” and placed the case in his hands on an appeal to the Supreme Court of the United States, and that he took the case because the law was “unjust” and violated the principle of the “freedom of contract.”

Mr. Weissmann does not state whether it was his reputation as a lawyer that, having reached the master-bakers’ association, induced them to “come to him,” or what was the reason and method by which they came together. Indeed, the information is unnecessary. The decision of the Supreme Court of the United States is, as we have shown in these columns, planted, not upon the law, but upon a finding of fact by the Court—the alleged fact that ten hours steady work each week in a bakery establishment is not dangerous to health, an alleged fact that involves this other fact that the wages received are not incapable of restoring the life-tissue expended in such establishments, and therefore inhuman.

It was not as a lawyer but as an “expert on the bake-shop” that Mr. Weissmann helped the capitalist to stab the Working Class in the back—thus furnishing the latest justification for the attitude that the Socialist Labor Party took against him in 1892, when he and his set, with Gompers at their head, were branded and fought for what it was perfectly obvious that they were.