

EDITORIAL

CORRUPTION IN UNIONISM.

By DANIEL DE LEON

UPON the announcement being made at the convention of the United Mine Workers, now in session in Columbus, O., that the general vote of the organization had elected John P. White in his place for president of the organization, the present incumbent Tom L. Lewis is reported to have addressed the body in these terms:

“I pledge my word to you that because I have been defeated I will not sell my knowledge of the Union to friends or representatives of the class against which we are fighting for living wages and hours.”

This is a remarkable declaration. It is a ringing slap administered to the faces of the MacBrides, the Wilsons, the Cavanaughs, the Mitchells—the long line of presidents of the United Mine Workers, as they successively dropped, or were dropped, from the presidency of the organization, and instanter blossomed forth as mine-owners themselves, or in some other capacity that brought them in line with the “friends and representatives of the class” against which the miners “are fighting for living wages and hours.”

The fact, clearly enough pointed at by President Lewis’s statement, is no slander. It is not the venom spewed by an angry man smarting under defeat. It is a fact well known; a fact repeatedly pointed out and commented on in these columns. It is a fact that characterizes the so-called Gompers Labor Movement. It is, moreover, a fact that discloses a large number of kindred facts, the thorough digestion of which is essential to the proper diagnosis of the Labor Situation in America.

The Labor Movement of the land has been condemned as hopelessly corrupt. The condemnation is a favorite one on the lips of the Utopian and other shallow Socialists. Little does this fry realize that its condemnation is a condemnation of themselves—their “intellectuality” and their policy.

No thoughtful man, even if he be no trained Socialist, ever will embrace masses of men in a sweeping condemnation. Even if one be no trained Socialist, provided he has lived with open eyes, the observation can not have escaped him that the human race is not inherently corrupt. Though he be no Eastern sage to perceive that “man is like water—as water, which naturally tends downward, can be forced upward by artificial means, so man, who naturally tends upward, can, by artificial means, be forced downward,”—though he be no Eastern sage to perceive that psychologic fact, he certainly has gathered experience enough to allow him an inkling of that human characteristic. The trained Socialist is well aware of the fact. He knows the reason why; and, knowing, strains to remove the “artificial means” that drive man to vileness.

The corruption that President Lewis’s statement discloses is to-day general. The leaders are centers of the leprosy, and from them the leprosy radiates into the rank and file. But are they natural-born lepers? Not at all. Hardly a labor leader can be mentioned, Gompers not excepted, who started tainted. What they started with was Ignorance of the problem that they grappled with; and failure on the wrong path caused them to “throw in the sponge.” With the prospect of Labor’s emancipation barred from their vista, there remained nothing to them but {to} seek to feather their own nests. The end of the song is Corruption in its manifold aspects—a scourge for which the Utopian Socialist, with his blindness to the necessity of the Union for the accomplishment of the revolutionary act, and his bundle of false theories to justify his “neutrality,” is in a large measure responsible.

Wrong is no abstraction. There would be no Wrong if there were no man to uphold it. The exposure of Wrong, a necessary policy, implies the exposure of him who commits the Wrong. The exposure of the corrupt acts that misguided Unionism is guilty of is an imperative duty that rests on the shoulders of the Socialist. He who shirks the duty thereby confesses himself a promoter of Corruption, being a carrier of friendship with Corruption.

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