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Report of Daniel De Leon

One of the Seven Representatives of D.A. 49 at the Washington G.A., to the Members of the K. of L.

To the Members of the Order of the Knights of Labor:

In 1891 D.A.¹ 49 had sunk about as low as an organization of workingmen could. A Tammany heeler at the Capital shared the honors harmoniously with a Tom Platt Republican heeler on the floor. Whatever decency and regard for the cause of labor there was entertained by some was held down by the labor fakirs. The district dared call no mass meetings lest it exhibited its weakness and thereby lowered the market price of those who looked upon the organization merely as a thing to traffic on. This disgraceful state of things suffered a check in July of that year. A Socialist delegate from L.A.² 1563 made his appearance on the floor of the district, and from that day on the corruptionists began to be crowded to the wall. The overthrow of Powderly and his cabinet of barnacles at the Philadelphia G.A.³ in 1893 added new impetus to the purification of D.A. 49. One after another new and progressive Locals were added; what with them, and the pure elements that had always been in the district, a new era was started; the District grew in power and standing and soon took a foremost place among the central organizations of labor in this city.

In this work of solidifying, enlightening and purifying the trade and labor movement in this city, the Socialist element in D.A. 49 found itself greatly hampered by the blundering political economy and false sociology preached by the General Officers who had been elected in 1893. The *Journal* of the Order⁴ was inane and silly, and the General Master Workman, James R. Sovereign, together with the four members of the General Executive Board, hardly ever opened his mouth in public without putting

¹District Assembly

²Local Assembly

³General Assembly

⁴*Journal of the Knights of Labor*

his foot into it. D.A. 49 looked charitably upon these performances; annoyed tho' it was at them, it imputed them to unintentional ignorance, and sought to check the evil by educating its officers.

With this end in view the 8 Socialist delegates to the New Orleans G.A. last year held a conference. They were: the 4 delegates of D.A. 49, Wm. L. Brower, the D.M.W.,⁵ Patrick Murphy, the D.R.S.,⁶ Michael Kelly, the D.W.F. and myself; Richard J. Kerrigan, of Montreal; J.J. Reifgraber, of St. Louis, and the 2 delegates of the Brewers' N.T.A.,⁷ August Priesterbach and Charles Bechtold. The final decision arrived at was that, there being danger of the old Powderly gang coming in, we were bound to support the administration, but that, this danger notwithstanding, we could not assume the responsibility of re-electing the General Officers unless they pledged themselves to allow the delegation of D.A. 49 to nominate the editor of the *Journal*, and in that way turn the paper from the absurdity that it was into a source of enlightenment to the workers. We asked the General Officers to hold a full session and meet us. The meeting took place in the Hotel Royal on Nov. 18, 1894. All the General Officers were present, from Sovereign down. We stated our demands, conditioning our support of all the General Officers upon a pledge to place the control of the *Journal* in our hands. The General Officers asked time to consider. Brother Brower suggested at the meeting with the General Officers that the pledge, if given, be given in writing; I rejected the suggestion on the ground that if a verbal pledge was not binding, a written one would be worthless. The following day, speaking for all the General Officers, James R. Sovereign gave us the pledge; we supported all the General Officers; and before leaving New Orleans I placed in the hands of Mr. Sovereign a written application, signed by all the 8, recommending Brother Lucien Sanial of L.A. 1563 as editor of the *Journal*. Mr. Sovereign informed me the transfer would be made by the 1st of the following January, and I so notified Brother Sanial. In subsequent issues of THE PEOPLE I shall publish the documents upon this and all other matters touched upon in this report. Suffice it here to say that in January Mr. Sovereign pleaded the poverty of the Order as an excuse for not appointing Brother Sanial; that this excuse was removed by Brother Sanial's offer not to demand the \$30 a week that the editor got, and to do the work for \$7 until better times, as an act of abnegation to the Order; and that the matter ended there. Nothing more was heard from the General Officers, but Henry B. Martin of the General Executive Board took the editorship. In the penury of the Order the General Officers were getting little or no salary. Had Mr. Martin remained simply a member

⁵District Master Workman

⁶District Recording Secretary

⁷National Trade Association

of the G.E.B., his wages would not have been forthcoming. By being made the editor of the *Journal* he received under the guise of editor the \$24 a week which he would not have otherwise got. Thus the Order, which claimed to be too poor to pay a \$7 salary, found it feasible to pay a \$24 one.

But the giving of this \$24 pension to Mr. Martin was not the sole purpose of the breach of faith on the part of the General Officers. Their breach of faith was the key to far darker crimes, to crimes against the Order and the working class in general. As will appear in the sequel, that breach of faith and the placing of Mr. Martin, of Minneapolis, in control of the *Journal* was a necessary step for the speculation contemplated by the General officers and for the disgraceful traffic which they meant to conduct and succeeded in conducting with the headquarters of the Order as chief office.

1. *The Critic*, defunct since elections, was a paper that circulated in Baltimore, it was dated in that city, and it was started and kept up as a campaign sheet to boom Gorman's candidate for Governor in Maryland. It assailed not the Socialist ticket only, but also the Populist ticket in that State, and sang the praises of the Democratic ticket and the Democratic party as the true friend of labor. Now, that pro-capitalist sheet, that adversary of the labor party, that bunco steering concern was written, set up and printed at the headquarters of the Order under the immediate supervision of Mr. H.B. Martin; to a great extent, as may be verified by comparing the files, it was made up of matter bodily lifted from the *Journal*. Thus, apart from the infamy of the headquarters of the Order being used as a basis of operation for capitalist political supremacy, and apart from the further infamy of the *Journal* articles being so written as not to conflict with the special articles in *The Critic*, we were treated to the spectacle of Mr. Sovereign making speeches for populism, while the headquarters under his charge were deriving revenue by publishing an anti-populist campaign sheet!

2. Besides *The Critic* job work, the headquarters got the job of printing 50,000 copies of Gorman's Baltimore speech. Every one knows what it means when capitalist politicians give such a job to a labor organization.

3. In Charter Book 43, p. 58, in charge of the Secretary of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Harrisburg, Pa., and dated March 21, 1894, will be found a charter of incorporation granted to a gas company which purports to exploit an invention that John W. Hayes, the G.S.T. of the Order, claims to have made (!?!). "Thomas B.

Maguire” appears as one of the incorporators together with Jacob G. Schonfarber, the Baltimore agent of Gorman, and Daniel J. Hayes, the brother of Hayes. Thomas B. Maguire, a member of the G.E.B., repudiates the “insinuation” that he is the “T.B. Maguire” of the charter, and he does so in almost the identical language of the Sugar-trust Senator caught speculating in bonds, who said: “It is not me, it is my son.” While Maguire and Sovereign and the rest are denouncing “bond issues,” we find two General Officers and their chief adjutant trying to float the bonds of a corporation which they own. But how are these bonds to be floated? Let us see:

4. On February 1, 1893, John W. Hayes writes on the official letter head of the Order a letter to Charles Martin, of Tiffin, O., in which, after seeking to persuade him to step out of the labor movement as unprofitable, suggests to him that he undertake the agency of the gas concern for Ohio, and points out how to get the charters or franchise from the towns in this language: “Make your capital stock at about \$75,000, and if necessary GIVE AWAY \$25,000 OF IT TO GET THE RIGHT FROM THE TOWN.” In other words, bribe your way through. This letter also will appear in full over Hayes’ own signature. And yet again:

5. There will be found in the *Congressional Records* of this year a statement by Congressman J. Frank Aldridge producing a correspondence he had with D.A. 24 of Chicago, in which there figures a dispatch to Mr. Aldridge from one Joseph Banes, assuming to denounce the Congressman in the name of D.A. 24 for having voted in a certain way on a gas bill, and a subsequent official letter from D.A. 24, signed by the D.M.W. and the D.R.S., from which it appears that Joseph Banes proceeded upon his own responsibility. Now, this Joseph Banes is an employee at the headquarters of the Order.

Each of these facts was categorically proved at the Washington G.A. this month. That knowledge of each and every one of them was held in D.A. 49 was also well known by the General Officers. They knew full well that with a Socialist, a nominee of D.A. 49, at headquarters and in control of the *Journal* such rascality and perfidity to the workingclass could never have thrived; the headquarters could never have been turned into a den of scoundrelism, from which political jobbery and blackmailing schemes upon Congressmen, and schemes to gain franchises for corporations by corruption would have issued or been fostered. The guilt the Order’s headquarters was conscious of, and the further consciousness of the fact that D.A. 49, and especially L.A. 1563, had its eyes upon the malefactors in office, made them look with grave suspicion upon D.A. 49. Still as late as last July the pack of brigands in Washington felt comparatively at ease. It so happened that, owing to local strikes

in New York, our per capita had run low. No more than 2 delegates were expected by headquarters from D.A. 49 at the approaching Washington G.A. But they erred. Within a few weeks we paid up the per capita upon a larger number of our membership; and when General Executive Board {member} T.B. Maguire, "The Father," learned that we would "be there" with 6, if not 7 or more, delegates, he acted as if he had been thunder-struck. D.A. 49 became forthwith an object of dread for headquarters, not only by reason of what it knew and was known to be determined to expose, but especially by reason of the large vote it would be able to cast in the G.A.

In the midst of their quandary how to escape the doom with which the large delegation of D.A. 49 threatened them, the General Officers received unexpected aid from St. Louis.

Mr. Ernest Kurzenknabe, a cross between an Anarchist and a "Pure and Simpler" of the basest sort, as shown in THE PEOPLE of last Oct. 13th,⁸ is the editor of the *Brauer-Zeitung* and national secretary of the Brewers' Organization, affiliated with the K. of L. As a matter of course, this Kurzenknabe is a violent adversary of the Socialists, especially where they are in the field against capitalism, and are growing as majestically as they are doing in the twin cities of New York and Brooklyn. He resided in New York at one time, and here entered into a conspiracy with the Anarchist Weissmann, the political crook Gompers, and others, to disrupt the party in general, and the new trade unionist Central Labor Federation in particular. The result was that he and his fellow-conspirators were broken up; he was driven from New York, and has since been living in exile in St. Louis. As shown in THE PEOPLE on last Oct. 13th, the Kurzenknabe organization has in this city a "pure and simple" insignificant body, called "Brewers; Union No. 1"; this union has a boycott of old standing, which it is unable to enforce against what it calls "pool beer"; the Central Labor Federation, in which some K. of L. locals of D.A. 49 were represented, did not endorse the silly thing; this Brewers' Union is also in the Central Labor Union, which boycotts K. of L. workers, nevertheless, according to the approved methods of pure and simpledom, it demanded everything for itself, without being ready to support other workers. It grew wroth at the C.L.F., and this jumped exactly with Kurzenknabe's combined hatreds of the C.L.F. and of the Socialist Labor party. This was at about the time when the General Officers were at their wits' end how to parry the dreaded blow from D.A. 49. Kurzenknabe came to their aid. He wrote a letter to headquarters bringing charges against L.A. 1563 for being in the C.L.F., and then

⁸See "Vanderbillionism in 'Pure and Simpledom,'" *The People*, Oct. 13, 1895.

proceeded with a long diatribe and a string of invectives against the “New York Socialists,” who, together with the C.L.F., had to be downed, etc., etc. This important letter, throwing such valuable light upon matters, as will presently appear, was produced by Mr. Hayes himself at the G.A. Finding himself nailed on all sides by letters over his own signature, he lost his head; seeking to show what a wicked set the “New York Socialist” were, he produced this Kurzenknabe letter.

The Kurzenknabe letter suggested to the General Officers a plan to balk D.A. 49 from the G.A. L.A. 1563 was immediately summoned to a trial “by order of the G.E.B.,” although only two—Martin and Maguire, “The Father”—of the five members gave the order. The “trial” came off and the persecution broke to pieces. It was attempted to prove that L.A. 1563, together with fifteen other Socialist Locals in D.A. 49, had disobeyed the order to boycott, and thus it was expected to knock D.A. 49 to pieces. In the first place, it soon appeared that, even if the order to boycott had been disobeyed, it could not have been disobeyed by more than two Locals, and thus, even if these were immediately expelled, it would not cripple the D.A. This was the first disappointment to the conspirators. The second was worse yet. It was proved that both the other Locals had loyally observed the boycott, and that the only ones who did not were the accusers themselves, who got drunk on pool beer.

Immediately upon the failure of the first case, the G.E.B. trumped up a new charge against L.A. 1563, and at the same time extended its line of attack by taking the hint given by Kurzenknabe against the Socialists. On Oct. 16th, the day before the second summons was issued against L.A. 1563, Mr. Hayes wrote to J.W. Patterson, D.M.W. of D.A. 6 in Ottawa, Canada, urging the District to send a delegate to the G.A.; the expenses, he explained, would be easily “covered by the mileage of the delegates”; and then he proceeds to explain why the matter is so urgent; he says: “I don’t think there will be much of a contest this time other than the Socialists who have been trying to rule a portion of the Order, and are trying to get control of the G.A. This is impossible, however, but nothing will be left to chance. . . . Have your delegate with us, if possible.” Simultaneously with that, Mr. Hayes sought to estrange Richard J. Kerrigan, of Montreal, from D.A. 49, and, thinking he had succeeded, sent him money to come along. In both these cases Mr. Hayes barked up the wrong tree, and his Canadian correspondence was produced in the G.A., very much to his discomfiture. How many more of such letters were in all likelihood sent to distant delegates raising the bugaboo of Socialism will also presently appear.

Covering up their rear by such means, Martin, Maguire and French appeared in this city to try L.A. 1563 on the second charge. The L.A. demurred to their jurisdiction,

the G.E.B. having no right to break through the jurisdiction of the D.A., especially in view of the fact that the D.M.W. of D.A. 49 had already instituted an investigation of the matter complained of. The three members of the G.E.B. tried to play “kangaroo court”; the L.A. appealed to the G.M.W., and refused to proceed until the decision of the G.M.W. was received. The G.E.B. then proceeded with utter disregard to law and decency; tried the case *ex parte*, notwithstanding the appeal from their jurisdiction; suspended the Local and recommended to the G.M.W. that its charter be revoked. L.A. 1563 then took an appeal to the G.M.W. from the decision, and on Oct. 29th the G.M.W. decided the conduct of the G.E.B. was wrong. He said: “I am of the opinion that an appeal on a constitutional question involving the jurisdiction of the G.E.B. to try the case was a valid ground to stop further procedure in the case until the question of jurisdiction was passed upon by the G.M.W.” This notwithstanding, the G.M.W. refused to reverse the decision, and he and the G.E.B. carefully abstained from re-organizing the L.A. with the innocent members. In this way the L.A. remained suspended when the G.A. met. In this way they sought to keep me out of the G.A., being a member of the L.A., and they hoped to be able to keep out all the other six delegates of D.A. 49, on the calculation that the District might rebel at such provocation.

The District kept its peace; its delegates entered the G.A., and I myself was conditionally admitted pending a decision by the G.A. on the appeals of my Local. The General Officers sought by hook and crook to smother the trial in the Committee on Appeals and Grievances, the chairmanship of which they had the indecency of giving to one of the office employees—Andrew D. Best, and which Best was indecent enough to accept. But they failed, and after much struggle the trial was held on Nov. 14th and 15th, before the G.A. itself.

At the trial, and substantiating every point with documents, as above quoted, I proved the conspiracy of the General Officers to defraud D.A. 49 of its representation and of the criminal reasons they had to fear us; I also proved the illegality of the two sham trials, beginning with an illegal summons and closing with a decision which Mr. Sovereign himself condemned as unlawful in view of the appeal to the jurisdiction. At this point mention should be made of a remarkable incident.

H.B. Martin tried to make out that I was a conspirator. In proof of that he stated that he had in his hands a statement signed by an honorable Knight of Labor, showing that at a recent meeting in Washington I had dissuaded an inquirer from joining the Order. I demanded the name of the signer of the statement; he answered, “Arthur Keep”; on the spot I demanded that the case be not closed before Arthur

Keep was confronted with me, and promised the G.A. that I would prove Martin a bearer of false testimony. Martin, as I subsequently learned, saw Keep that night and tried to inveigle him into signing the statement, which he, Martin, had stated that day on the floor of the G.A. was signed by Keep. Keep suspected a trick, and refused; he was told by Martin that he “might” be sent for the next day by the G.A.; but Keep, knowing his man, did not wait to be sent for, and appeared in the vestibule the next morning, much to the discomfiture of Martin. Brother Simmons, who represented the Washington district, had told me the previous night that he informed Martin that Keep had denied the statement as read by Martin; when, the next morning, at the meeting of the G.A., Nov. 15th, Brother Simmons informed me that Keep was at hand, I demanded that he be brought in. He was. Martin asked him if he had not made the statements which appeared on a slip of paper handed him by Martin. Thereupon followed a scene worth remembering. Keep read the slip through, and said, “No; I did not make this statement; there are things here which I did not say; and much that I did and is important does not appear here; for this reason I refused last night to sign this paper. You were putting a whole lot of things into my mouth that I did not say. This statement is substantially false.” Being examined by me, he stated he was from Minneapolis, the same as Martin; and being asked if he was a very intimate friend of Martin’s, he answered with disgust: “No; I could not be; he is as crooked as a ramshorn; he has done no end of mischief to the workmen in Minneapolis; he broke faith with them when he was in office and supported a fraudulent sale of property to the city; his paper there is for sale to the highest bidder of either of the capitalist parties.”

In this whole incident, Martin had counted without his host. The desperate straits he was in drove him to make the false charge; he never imagined he would be asked for his authority; he never thought I would have Keep produced; and when, that night he found out that Keep persisted in not signing the false statement, he did not imagine that Keep would appear before the G.A. without a “summons” from Martin. The exposure was complete.

Was the long array of facts and documents—the illegal summons, the decision suspending my L.A. and pronounced wrong by the G.M.W. himself, the delay in re-organizing my L.A., the infamy of the transactions with Gorman, the still blacker crime of Hayes’ gas corporation and the methods he recommended to float its bonds, and finally the crushing blow Martin had administered to himself with the Arthur Keep episode—was not all that enough to convince every decent man in the G.A. and to overthrow the pack that is riding the workingmen in the Order? It certainly was, and did. But the decent men were not in the majority. The vote cast against the

General Officers was 21, they kept 23. The G.A. was packed, and the packees, 13 in number, were voted by the administration. The situation was excellently summed up by Delegate Michael F. O'Brien, of Boston, who, on the floor of the G.A. said, in view of that disgraceful sight: "There are delegates here with strings tied to their legs so tight that they walk lame."

Nor should the fact be overlooked that Mr. Sovereign voted against his own decision, and subsequently to keep Hayes in office. The precious set hung together knowing that if they didn't they would hang separate.

Important as these facts are, the picture is not complete enough to enable one to arrive at a clear understanding of the situation without we look into the composition of the two sides into which the G.A. was divided—the 21 and the 23—and their respective constituencies.

The Order lost fully 20,000 members during the last year. It now numbers barely 30,000 in good standing. Of these about 6,000, scattered in all directions, were not represented at the G.A. There was left 24,000 represented.

The 21 votes cast for the cause of the working class and of honor—D.A. 49's 7, the Brewers' N.T.A.'s 2, D.A. 30's 2, the Miners N.T.A.'s 2, and D.A.'s 1, 4, 6, 12, 13, 18, 47 and 66, with 1 each—represented 17,000 workers.

The 23 votes cast for and by the administration represented barely 7,000 men. And what is more, of these 23, only 10 represented about 6,700; they were D.A. 253, with 3,500; D.A. 220, with 1,500; D.A. 75, with 300; the Clothing Cutters' N.T.A., with 700; D.A. 41, with 500; and D.A. 197, with 200. The remaining 13 votes represented barely 500; at best, they came from paper constituencies, like French, Vanderburg, of Oregon, Mansion, the Albany politician, Warren and John W. Hayes; the other 8 represented nothing whatever, not a shadow; these were Sovereign himself, who bragging articles about thousands flocking to him in the West are now amusing reading, Martin, whose District and Local are both defunct, Allen of Michigan, Forbes of South Carolina, Judge Lindholm, of malodorous Chicago celebrity, Murray and Robertson.

These figures and facts are suggestive. Reform from within should not be lightly given up. But what chance of reform is there from within with desperados like the

present officers holding the Order by the throat? They appoint the credential committees, they get the mileage to distribute and furnish the credentials. The larger and more powerful a district all the larger the mileage and other funds placed at the disposal of the General Officers with which to pack a G.A. with their disreputable creatures. D.A. 49, for instance, paid in \$350 mileage; of this amount it received back only \$75; \$275 of the District's funds were thus used to pack the G.A. against the District itself!

In view of all this I, for one, repudiate the Washington G.A., its decisions and the General Officers, and I call upon all self-respecting members of the Order to do the same. We cannot conscientiously invite any workingman to join an organization that is so hopelessly held in the grip of the ignorant and traitorous crew in control, and who have prostituted it to their own base ends.

But this is not all. Though to strand on the sands of disgrace the wreck that is left of the Order is in itself good work, the work of reconstruction must follow, else that of destruction is fruitless. The A.F. of L. has become the football of two political crooks. Its fate and that of the order is the fate that ever awaits pure and simpledom. The workers will no longer see-saw backwards and forwards from the Knights to the Federation, and back again. The two have now become a stench in the nostrils of the American proletariat. They have been the buffers of capitalism against which every move of progressive organization has spent its forces. Let us re-organize upon that higher plane that sooner or later the labor organizations are bound to take—the plane of identity of economic and political efforts, consolidated, inspired, guided and purified by the class consciousness of the wage slave, who, having nothing to lose but his chains and a world to win, is ready to devote himself to nothing less than to his complete emancipation, in the unflagging and unterrified pursuit of which no chance can be given for the labor barnacle to fasten upon, sell him out and nullify his efforts.

DANIEL DE LEON.

New York, Nov. 27, 1895.

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[Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.](#)

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