

The People.

VOL. V, NO. 30

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 20, 1895

PRICE 3 CENTS

FIRST EDITORIAL

‘Conservatism’

By DANIEL DE LEON

The scientific principle of the class struggle is a basic principle from which Socialist tactics proceed. The principle is denied by the superficial and the vicious as unsound and immoral. And yet, hear them talk and you will find that unconsciously they act obedient to it; like bees, who, without mathematical knowledge build their cells mathematically, the adversaries of the theory of the class struggle frame their conduct obedient thereto.

“Conservatism” is the motto of the upholders of the present system. “Conservatism” as against “Revolution” is what they commend.

In the one word the principle of the class struggle is ratified by its very denouncers.

The exploiting and idle class struggles upon the lines of their class interests. They aim to conserve the power they now enjoy to live in luxury without work, to ride the proletariat, to fleece the workers. That their aim should be such is not to be wondered at, it is natural. But for the very reason that “Conservatism” is natural with the capitalist class, “Revolution” is the natural principle to control the class struggle of the oppressed.

The working class of America has nothing, no economic or social powers worth conserving. “Conservatism” can never mean the striving to conserve chains. When the lot of a class is thralldom “Conservatism” ceases to be a natural principle with it; “Revolution” must become its moving spring. And that is the situation of more than one-half our population to-day.

Time was when the workers still held some economic power. They could combine in unions, and the force of their numbers in the shops and mills could insure for them a certain amount of freedom. That was when machinery had not yet reached its present perfection, when capitalist concerns had not reached their present stage of concentration, when, consequently, there were not more applicants for jobs than there

were jobs to be had. Now all that is changed. Owing to the stupendous army of the unemployed, coupled with the elimination of skill by the machine, the subdivision of labor, and the concentration of capital, the economic power once yielded by the workers is a thing of the past; and whatever little power they may still seem to possess in this respect, their bosses can at any moment shatter to pieces, as they have done again and again, with the aid of the public powers. Stripped of all economic power, and thereby thrust into rags, squalid homes, dependence, with overworked wives and underfed children, to talk conservatism to the worker is irony, and to hear the labor misleaders recommend the thing to the toilers is insanity, where it is not rascality.

“Conservatism” by all means, if there is anything worth conserving, and everything not worth losing.

“Revolution” if there is nothing worth conserving, and everything worth gaining.

These are the class lines upon which the political battle is being fought, and is bound to be fought to the end.

With the reactionary and, therefore, conservative ballot of the capitalist parties, backed by their guns, the oppressing class seeks to conserve its usurped position and continue to enjoy its stolen goods.

With the revolutionary, and therefore, Socialist ballot, ready to be backed by all other means if the capitalist class rebels against the fiat of the suffrage, the wage slave class, the proletariat, seeks to rid itself of its chains and to regain possession of its own!

On, to the ballot box!

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

Uploaded February 23, 2003