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EDITORIAL

Running Away—A Parallel

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Several Western papers, that claim to represent and speak for the “reform forces” of their vicinage, are shouting loudly for “harmony,” and publish their platform, to wit:

“Lay aside your politics, bring out your patriotism and unite on Direct Legislation through the Initiative and Referendum.”

To the uninitiated, this may look like a case of unmitigated crankism. They may argue:

“What, lay aside our politics? Does politics not imply convictions? If our political convictions are that we must conquer the public powers for the purpose of overthrowing the capitalist system, or keep the public powers for the purpose of protecting capitalism against the threatened onslaught of the Socialists, shall we give that up? Can deep-seated political convictions of the sort that are now dividing the country into a revolutionary camp, and a ‘law and order’ camp, be given up? Has it ever been possible to give them up? Has the solution ever been other than to fight it out on the great issues of such critical times? What cranks must not they be who imagine that, at such great national epochs, political convictions upon an impending revolution could be laid aside for matters of superficial reform!”

And yet, whoever reasoned thus, characterful though he evidently is, would simply betray the fact that he is uninitiated in the mysteries of revolutionary times, as we find them recorded in history.

The present attempt to induce people to drop their political convictions on the burning questions of the day is nothing new. It exactly parallels an identical attempt in the stirring days of the Abolition Movement.

As the nation drew nearer the cascade of the Civil War, the issue of chattel slavery,

and the further issue of secession, which already projected itself into the political arena, grew hotter and hotter; “party feeling” ran high; the controversy was fierce; the lines were being drawn with that sharpness that stirring questions alone bring out; and the country seemed divided between two armies, ready to fly at each others’ throats. At that moment, there sprang up a new movement or party; it called itself the “Constitutional Union” party; it met in convention in Baltimore on May 9, 1860, and issued a platform of which the following portions strike the key-note:

“WHEREAS, EXPERIENCE has demonstrated that platforms adopted by the PARTISAN conventions of the country have had the effect to mislead and deceive the people, and at the same time to WIDEN the political divisions of the country by the elevation and encouragement of geographical and sectional parties; therefore

“RESOLVED, That it is both the part of patriotism and of duty to recognize NO POLITICAL PRINCIPLES other than the Constitution of the Country,” etc., etc.

The men who gathered in this party were no cranks, they were weaklings. They saw a storm approaching, their hearts quaked, and they sought to run away from the political storm by simply ignoring it, as though the hurricanes of great social convulsions could be dissipated by ignoring them any more than the hurricanes of the atmosphere!

Exactly such is the make-up of the gentlemen who now plead for the one plank Direct Legislation platform. Theirs and the attitude of the “Constitutional Union” party of 1860 is one. Even their language is cast in the same mold. Both deprecate “partisanism” and the “widening of political divisions”; both implore the deeply-moved people to drop all the “political principles” that are now agitating them; and both appeal to “patriotism,” as though it were a house of refuge in which to escape from the approaching storm. The one and the other imagine that the social storm of their day could be outwitted. So thinking, they both play the ostrich act—hide their heads and, not seeing, imagine are not seen.

As the parallel between the two is accurate so far, so will it tally in the final issue. The social hurricane of 1860 swept down upon the land, and the “Constitutional Union” party has not been heard from since. So will the social hurricane that is gathering over the heads of the present generation sweep into oblivion all negative political crafts.

The present social issue cannot be run away from, any more than could the issue of the days preceding 1860. The partisan hickory-bludgeons of the ballot—the ones marked

SOCIALISM, CAPITALISM the others—are alone fit for, can alone figure in the fray.

Thoughts speculative their unsure
hopes relate,

But certain issue strokes must
arbitrate.

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

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