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## The “New Yorker Volkszeitung.” {1}

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**T**he *New Yorker Volkszeitung* of the 14th instant, commenting upon the honest and the dishonest elements at the so-called convention of the so-called American Federation of Labor, proceeds to say:

The comfort of these two elements was formerly not quite so well provided for at the time when there were more Socialist pikes in that pond; at the time, namely, when a part of these had not yet chosen to lead, outside of the American Federation, a separate existence of doubtful success, instead of, as formerly, tirelessly, unflaggingly, step by step, boring their way forward from within. At that time, the corruptionists of the Labor Movement always felt quite uncomfortable at the opening of every annual convention, because they were in the dark as to the strength in which the Socialists might turn up, as to the weapons of attack these might be equipped with, and as to how far these would succeed in making breaches in the ranks of the shaky. This sense of uneasiness is now wholly vanished.

The theory here advanced, together with the implied facts that are needed to support it, is a pure figment of the brain,—the abortion of a convenient ignorance on the history of the Movement in America, coupled with that queer “tactfulness” that consists in flinging about phrase-clad pretexts to justify indolence. It is a surreptitious re-asserting of tactics that the party, in national convention assembled in '96, solemnly threw aside for ever as stupid and poltroonish.

The historic fact is just the reverse from that stated in the passage above quoted. Not only had the Socialists not been “step by step boring their way forward” in the A.F. of L., but the “boring” process had become a “boring backward” and had come to a dead stop when the Socialists, by founding the Socialist Trade & Labor Alliance, set up their “separate existence.” The facts in the case, together with what they imply, are so instructive as to deserve rehearsal.

The high-water mark of Socialist “boring” forward in the A.F. of L. was reached at the Detroit convention of the A.F. of L. in 1890; from that year on, the “boring” was less

and less, till it finally had ceased altogether in '95. It was less at the Birmingham convention, '91; it was still less at the Philadelphia convention in '92; it was but puny at the Chicago convention in '93; at the Denver convention in '94 it had sunk so low that the "Socialistic" so-called "plank 10," after having been carried by the rank and file, could be coolly and without effort laid aside by the convention, one of the doers of the deed calmly declaring that "the rank and file did not know what it had voted for"; and finally, at the New York convention, '95, the "boring" had so completely disappeared that the convention openly adopted plans for fighting the Socialists everywhere. It was only then, end of December, 1895, to the orchestration of a challenge to war to the knife, desperately issued by the A.F. of L. convention in this very city, that the S.T. & L.A. was founded and the "separate existence" began. Thus much for that fiction of "tirelessly, step by step, boring our way forward from within" when the "separate existence" was begun.

But it is not only against facts that the passage in question sins; it sins also against an important principle that the philosophy of the Movement in English speaking countries has established, and that it is culpable neglect to overlook, let alone blur or suppress, to wit, that the evolution of the Labor-Fakir-run "pure and simple" Union is from conservatism to reaction, from reaction to corruption, and that the growth of the class-conscious Labor vote hastens the development.

It was no accident that the turning point in the Socialist "boring forward" coincided with the year 1890, and that it had wholly vanished in 1895 at the New York convention. There is deep meaning in the fact. In 1890 for the first time the Socialist Labor party took the field in the State of New York under its own name and in a manner that denoted the closing of an old, the opening of a new era. The taking of the political field by the S.L.P. could not choose but throw the Labor Fakir on a new tack. Thitherto, in whispered and other notes, he had been assuring the Socialists of his devotion to Socialism—but; "but the rank and file are not yet ready," "leave us alone, and we will indoctrinate them," etc., etc., The S.L.P. of those olden days believed, kept quiet, and the Labor Fakir had a free field. With the uncompromising stepping on the political field of the State of New York by the S.L.P., this humbugging of old could not continue. The Labor Fakir had to show his hands; no longer would whispered protestations of sympathy do; acts alone could tell. The Labor Fakir brigade pulled itself together to protect its special "class interests"; first it threw out pretexts for opposing "S.L.P. Socialism," but presently by degrees it dropped the mask and boldly and baldly took the field against Socialism itself, embracing in it denunciations all the Socialist movements of Europe.

This process did not start in '90; as late as April, '91, Mr. Gompers, in a conversation with a comrade at the St. James Hotel in Minneapolis, expressed his

belief that the party in New York would not that year follow up the campaign of '90. It was, he thought, only one of the many fitful attempts the party had made before; the "small vote," he referred contemptuously to the 13,700 votes of '90, "must surely discourage the party"; etc., etc. Fakirdom watched; its expectations were disappointed. Not only did the party not give up, but it spread from State to State: in '91, when the Birmingham convention met, 3 States were in line; in '92, there were 6 in line; in '93 the total vote had risen to over 25,000; in '94 the "plague" had spread over 9 States; and, finally in '95 not only had the "plague" spread over 11 States, but, in the very city of New York, where the A.F. of L. convention of that year was held, the S.L.P. vote had more than doubled since '90, it rose to 10,993!

The rise of the party's vote is the barometer of the Labor Fakirs' opposition. He pulled himself together; his methods of corruption, backed by capitalist politicians, both in the A.F. of L. and the K of L., gave him the advantage of numbers in his conventions. His safety demanded the strongest front against the "plague"; and corruption funds bound his class together in an impassable barrier. To imagine that any further "boring forward" was then any longer possible was silly, none but the chicken-livered could hold the view. As the political movement had clarified the situation, there was nothing left but the separate economic existence, started in '95, which, together with the political movement, has been leading the Labor Fakir the wildest dance he ever had. So far from his "uneasiness having now wholly vanished" he never was in hotter water. The best way the cattle thief knows to conceal stolen cattle is to mix it up with cattle that he owns. In the same manner the Labor Fakir delighted in mixing himself up among Socialists: So long as Socialists were conspicuous in the annual Fakirs' advertising medium, yclept the "Convention of the A.F. of L.", the Labor Fakirs' treason to the Working Class could be veiled, and, under the vale, was carried on with a success that is impossible now. How gladly would not the Labor Fakir see the Socialists continuing to pursue the will-o'-the-wisp of old by keeping "tactfully," right on, "boring their way forward from within"!

Passages, such as the one here submitted to the scalpel, can not find their way into the party's German organ, the *Vorwärts*: it is in charge of too clear-headed and conscientious a man for that.<sup>1</sup> But the *Vorwärts* is read mainly outside of this city; and there, indeed, we find the German element moving with steady pace; in this city, however, the *Vorwärts* is little read: the *Volkszeitung* is considered its daily edition. In view of the appearance of such and similar wrong-headed and misleading articles in a German Socialist daily paper in this city, is it at all surprising that progress from the quarter of the German element is not here what it might be?

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<sup>1</sup> [Hugo Vogt.—R.B.]

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