

The People.

VOL. IX, NO. 1

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, APRIL 2, 1899

PRICE 2 CENTS

ARTICLE

SIGN-POSTS

*That Will Have to Guide the Party
For the Safe-Keeping of a “Daily People”*

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As the DAILY PEOPLE is casting its shadows before it, the practical question of the nature of the organization that, due to technical and legal exigencies, will have to be framed for its direct management, is looming up into importance. In the deciding of what the nature of that organization shall have to be the party may pick its way by the light of the experience that it is just now making with the organization that is publishing the *Volkszeitung*.

The reader of THE PEOPLE will remember the three successive articles on the *Volkszeitung* in our issues of last December 25, January 1, and January 8. In the first two, the paper was called to account for its surreptitious and shy-cock attacks upon the party policy, and, in the third, notice was made of the runaway answer it gave upon these, and of the unanimous censure passed upon its Editor by the paper's Board of Directors, all but one being present at that meeting.

An attitude hostile to the S.L.P. was noting new on the part of the *Volkszeitung*. It is now only about four years ago, when it perpetrated a series of articles upon the proposed so-called “Plank 10” of the A.F. of L., holding a position in those article that, apart from their general politico-economic unsoundness, hinted quite clearly at the advisability of the organization of the new “Labor” party, and supported its arguments by repeating certain slanders against Comrade Sanial that, at the time, were in vogue among the fakirs. Both THE PEOPLE and the party's German organ promptly attacked the *Volkszeitung*. The matter—whether taken thither by the Editor of the *Volkszeitung* himself or someone else, we do not now recall—, came before the old Section New York, with the result that the Editor of the *Volkszeitung* was censured and its Board of Directors was requested “to see to it

that the paper's columns be not used as a telephone for the malice of the fakirs against party members."—The matter ended there.

This time, the Editor of the *Volkszeitung* brought up the matter of the differences between THE PEOPLE and the *Volkszeitung* together with the censure passed upon him, before the Volkszeitung Publishing Association (officially known as the Socialistic Co-operative Publishing Association), and, after a protracted debate, the Association, by a vote of 62 against 28, rejected at its meeting of the 23d of last month, the action of the Board of Directors both with regard to the censure and their authorizing of its publication in THE PEOPLE.

When it is considered that the constitution of the Association expressly prescribes that its publications shall be edited IN ACCORD WITH THE PRINCIPLES AND TACTICS OF THE S.L.P., the decision that the Association arrived at on the 23d, thus flying in the face of its own constitution, would be in itself suggestive enough; contrasted with the conduct of the Association in the instance of four years ago, afore mentioned, when, by its silence, approval was implied, its present attitude becomes still more interesting to watch. The details of the last occurrence throw such a light upon the matter that they raise it to one of still greater interest; revealing a situation that is full of suggestions upon some of the rocks that the party will have to steer clear of for the safety of its oncoming English daily.

During the debate, with hardly an exception, those who supported the Editor of the *Volkszeitung* cheered the conduct that he was censured for on the ground that it was proper to attack the party policy. Again and again the statement was made by his supporters that "we must emancipate ourselves from the party"; again and again they declared that "it is time to resist the party policy"; again and again was the party's policy, not on the trades union question only, but on a score of other questions, roundly denounced and the conduct of the *Volkszeitung* in the matter at hand hailed as the turning over of a new leaf. Tolerance for Anarchists was demanded (Herstein); the party was ridiculed (Heinrich); its membership and thereby itself was belittled, and the General Committee of Section Greater New York was pronounced hopeless and even corrupted (H. Stahl); a rupture between the party and the *Volkszeitung* was declared to threaten no harm to the paper (A. Jonas); the party's attitude towards Debsism was called "mud-slinging" (Köln); and, as a matter of course, THE PEOPLE came in for a full share of abuse, although most of its assailants do not and cannot read it, and none knows enough English to judge. And these statements received, one after another, generous applause.

Here was a palpable annulling of the Association's constitution, and of rebellion against the party. But palpable as the fact was, an incident removed all doubt that might linger on the subject. Here and there, during the debate, the less heated felt constrained to cover up the cloven hoof of their attitude; they sought to cloak it up with the claim that the *Volkszeitung* article in question "were not attacks upon the party policy, and, consequently, were not a violation of the Association's constitution, but were merely the exercise of the just right of criticism." The veil was transparently thin, and was, in many an unguarded moment, torn through by the very ones who sought its protection. Nevertheless, seeing the argument was made, its sincerity was brought to a test. Comrade Hugo Vogt offered the following resolution:

WHEREAS, The "Socialist Co-operative Publishing Association" was established by the Socialist Labor Party for no other purpose than to gain supporters for the party through press publication; and that, in accord with this purpose, it is expressly prescribed by the constitution of the Association that the publications which is issues shall be edited in accord with the principles and the tactics of the S.L.P.;

WHEREAS, The tactics of the party on the subject of the trades union movement have been unequivocally defined in the following resolution of the National Party Convention, held in New York in 1896:

"Whereas, Both the A.F. of L. and the K. of L., or what is left of them, have fallen hopelessly into the hands of dishonest and ignorant leaders;

"Whereas, These bodies have taken shape as the buffers for capitalism, against whom every intelligent effort of the working class for emancipation has hitherto gone to pieces;

"Whereas, The policy of 'propitiating' the leaders of these organizations has been tired long enough by the progressive movement, and is to a great extent responsible for the power which these leaders have wielded in the protection of capitalism, and the selling out of the workers;

"Whereas, No organization of labor can accomplish anything for the workers that does not proceed from the principle that an irrepressible conflict rages between the capitalist and the working class,—a conflict that can be settled only by the total overthrow of the former and the establishment of the Socialist Commonwealth; and

"Whereas, This conflict is essentially a political one, needing the combined political and economic efforts of the working class; therefore, be it

"Resolved, That we hail with unqualified joy the formation of the Socialist Trade & Labor Alliance as a giant stride towards throwing off

the yoke of wage slavery and of the robber class of capitalists; We call upon the Socialist of the land to carry the revolutionary spirit of the S.T. & L.A. into all the organizations of the workers, and thus consolidate and concentrate the proletariat of America in one irresistible class-conscious army, equipped both with the shield of the economic organization and the sword of the Socialist Labor party ballot.”

WHEREAS, This resolution was adopted, not by the National Convention only, but also by an overwhelming referendum vote (more than 10 to 1) of the party membership, and that the same has been endorsed in almost all the State Conventions of the S.L.P., held since 1896; and that the tactics therein defined have, more particularly with regard to the local field of activity of the N.Y. *Volkszeitung*, been confirmed in three successive general votes of the membership of this locality; therefore be it

RESOLVED, That it is the duty of the Board of Directors to see to it that the Editor of the *Volkszeitung* adhere(s) to the attitude of the party upon this tactical question, that is held by the party to be one of the most important points in its tactical programme.

If the claim was honest that the issue was not one of the party's tactics; if the claim was honest that the issue did not involve the violation of the Association's constitution, and thereby imply disloyalty to the party, this resolution would have been adopted, at least to save appearances. But IT WAS DEFEATED BY A VOTE OF 54 AGAINST 30 REFUSING TO CONSIDER IT. All false pretence was scraped off.

There is a third incident that took place on that evening and that deserves mention in this connection as indicating the trend of events. About a year ago, one Rudolph Modest was tried for injuring the interests of the Association. His guilt was manifest; his expulsion was demanded; to get rid of the fellow was a desirable thing to the party: the fellow admitted having joined a hostile political party; for the party to rid an Association, that publishes party organs, of an avowed party enemy was the evident duty of every party member in the Association. But the motion to expel Modest failed of the constitutional majority. One of the members of the Association, Leib by name, who voted against the expulsion of Modest, and who is a member of the party, was censured for his conduct by his Assembly District. He protested emphatically against such action, his principal ground being that he was not accountable to the party for his conduct in the Association. This was thought a queer attitude. On the 23d of last month the attitude lost its queerness and sprang forth into its serious significance.

Careful followers of party affairs will not have missed the report of the session of

February 25 of the General Committee of Section Greater New York, published the THE PEOPLE of last March 5. Resolutions were there introduced by Comrade Vogt, in which the *Volkszeitung* was condemned for first mutilating the reasons given in the Committee why certain candidates, then running for national offices, were unworthy of support, and then publishing letters by these same candidates calling upon Vogt to state the reasons, which the paper itself had suppressed and mutilated. The resolutions were adopted.

Now, then, the identical Leib, who protested against being called to account by the party for his actions in the Association, brought, on that evening of March 23d, charges against Vogt demanding his expulsion for his action in the party! Thus a member of the Association, who is a member of the party, is not responsible to the party for his acts in the Association; but a member of the party, who is a member of the Association, IS responsible to the Association for his acts in the party. IN OTHER WORDS, THE ASSOCIATION IS THE SUPERIOR, THE S.L.P. THE INFERIOR BODY!!

These three successive incidents—the vote justifying the *Volkszeitung's* articles to the orchestration of denunciations of the party; next, the vote rejecting the constitutional clause of loyalty to the party; and finally, the action of Leib countenanced by the Association—, are three culminating gradations. When to them is added the circumstance that, at no time, did Schlueter, the Editor of the *Volkszeitung*, who, at the meeting, “explained his position,” repudiate a single anti-party utterance of his supporters; and when the further circumstances are taken into account that the *Volkszeitung* has been suppressing information damaging to Haverhillism; that it has editorially disclaimed knowledge of the information necessary to refute the absurd excuses given by the Haverhillites for their Armory record; that it is, editorially, making convulsive efforts to suppress the fact that it was the S.T. & L.A. that conducted the Allegheny strike, and that, but for the existence of the S.T. & L.A., the proletarian upflaring in this case would have been captured and led into the ground by the pure and simple fakirs, and would have been lost to the movement as usual; that (very much like the Haverhillites, who also throw in, somewhere in a corner of their taxation stuff, phrases about the abolition of the wage system and the necessity of voting only for their party) the *Volkszeitung* is publishing, editorially, genuine “reform” small-traders’ sentiments on taxation, all in opposition, not only to a healthy, aggressive Socialist movement, but in direct opposition to the party’s officially expressed attitude as set forth in its municipal programme;—when all this is taken into account, the fact stands indisputable that THE VOLKSZEITUNG PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION HAS

LOST CASTE, AND IS NOW DRIFTING INTO OPEN HOSTILITY TO THE PARTY.

Well and wittily did a comrade strike off the situation on that evening of March 23d. The yearly election for the Editor of the *Volkszeitung* coming up in the order of business after the above votes, the comrade nominated JUSTUS SCHWAB as the most appropriate man for the office, under the circumstances.

We imagine we hear at this stage the cry of surprise: "What, Justus Schwab; that lager-bier Anarchist; that notorious enemy of the party; that clown of the Labor Movement; is HE too a member of the Volkszeitung Publishing Association?" Yes, and not only he but a number of others of more or less equal kidney. Among the members, for instance, is Ernest Bohm, who, formerly, rarely attended the meetings, but now, since he left the party to escape expulsion for publishing advertisements of capitalist parties in the Souvenir of the late, lamented Central Labor Federation, has an interest in seeking to do the party all the mischief he can, and, together with his supporters in guilt, is always on deck; Philip Bauer and Sohr, both of whom, in and out of season, have nothing but slander for the party, and oppose it at all turns, and the latter of whom was told in his own union by a German fellow member that, in Germany, he would be looked upon as a police agent; a Dr. Hoffman, "Gold-bug Anarchist"; one Filley, all around crazy Anarchist—all non-members of the party, and who knows how many more. And this brings us to the lessons to be learned.

The Volkszeitung Publishing Association was established by the party, as a publishing committee of the party and for the party's sake; and it owes its existence to the party, without which it can not live; indeed, its constitution provides that none but members of the party are qualified for membership. But the constitution goes no further. The Red Card is necessary for admission; but, once in, the card may become as black as pitch, and membership is not forfeited. From this central defect flow all the other evils.

Even if the party were to yank out of its own midst every unworthy member, such action would not rid the Association of them; on the contrary, the party might even be "held up" by such people, out of fear that, if it expels them and they are already members of the Association, they would then seek there to wreak vengeance, by turning the paper against the party.

More closely connected with that evil, than might seem at first blush, is this other,

which is just now illustrated in the Association: An opposition element (that not only is a mere minority of the party membership in this locality, as is conclusively shown by the recent vote on national officers, but that represents a pitiable minority of the party at large, as happens in this instance), may have (as in this instance) the majority in the Association; and, due to defective safeguards on the part of the party in the organization of the Association, that minority, held under control within the party, can make, in the Association, a “coup de main,” capture the paper and thus seek to lord things over the party. And that is just what is happening. And when it is considered that this party minority, but Association majority, is conspicuously composed (apart from the outright hostile and non-party member contingent, and a few down-right vicious individuals) of an element among whom not one active and experienced party worker is to be found, but mainly old, tired-out party members, tired-out and disheartened through past efforts and the failures that were inevitable, due to their unfamiliarity with the country, its ways, its language, and its people—when all this is considered then there appears glaringly both the full significance of recent occurrences, and the preposterousness of the situation. Then also will be understood the attitude of Section Greater New York, as reported elsewhere in this issue. The party is in no humor to be trifled with.

All of which should serve as sign-posts for guidance in framing the organization that will have to be entrusted, at least technically, with the publication of the now all the more urgently needed DAILY PEOPLE.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded July2004