

EDITORIAL

AN INVOLUNTARY CONFESSION.

By DANIEL DE LEON

FROM several parts of the country, particularly from Massachusetts, reports are coming in of resolutions adopted by the Kangaroo Social Democratic party, to the effect that henceforth they will no longer allow their meetings to be disturbed or broken up. If the resoluters had said no more, only the best informed on the events of the day would have appreciated the point, and understood what it all meant. To the average reader, the resolve to prevent one's meetings from being disturbed and broken up is natural, even praiseworthy. People who have something to say should by all means guard against that rowdyish instinct of boys and loafers to get into a meeting for the sole purpose of disturbing it. But unfortunately for the resolvers in this case, they were not content with saying they would no longer allow their meetings to be "disturbed and broken up." Driven by a fatality that confirms the theory of there being a Providence that shapes man's ends, rough-hew them as he will, they went on to state in what consisted the cause of their disturbed and broken-up meetings, and what it was that they were going to stop. The resoluters declare they "will no longer allow Socialist Labor Party men to ask questions."

What a robust confession, however involuntary!

No man can disturb, let alone break up a Socialist Labor Party meeting by the asking of a question. On the contrary. Questions are invited at such meetings; and whatever their nature—whether clever or stupid, bona fide or mala fide, decent or blackguard—, the questions always tend to solidify an S.L.P. meeting, enhance its success. If the question is clever, it enables the speaker to elucidate his point more completely; if it is stupid, it serves to contrast sense with nonsense; if it is bona fide, however mistaken, it affords opportunity to enlighten an erring brother; if it is mala fide, it is sure to bear its own refutation; if it is decent, it aids to clarify the audience; if it is indecent, it is a mighty argument on the speaker's side. Audiences of any magnitude may be relied on to be aided by questions, whatever the nature of

these; and thereby they aid the speaker greatly. It is natural therefore that a clean party, a sound party, an honest party with nothing to conceal, like the Socialist Labor Party, can only wish for questions at its meetings; never fears them; consequently, never “guards against” them. The very reason, that guides the Socialist Labor Party to follow that course, must, of course, guide and compel unclean parties, unsound parties, dishonest parties to act exactly the opposite: questions disturb their meetings and break them up: they clarify the audience.

That is the fix of the Kangaroo Social Democratic party. It claims to be a workingman’s party, and yet it builds armories and votes franchises for the capitalist class; it claims to stand upon the rock-bed of the Class Struggle, and yet its members are allowed to ask {for} and accept political jobs from capitalist parties; it claims to be Socialist, and yet it preaches bourgeois tactics. The speakers for such a party stand on a banana-peel, and they know it. The least question disconcerts them, despite all their assumed assurance. Theirs is what the German language expresses with inimitable picturesqueness, “Ohrfeigen-Gesicht”—a {“}box-on-the-ear face”—, i.e., their faces look as if they felt they deserved a box on the ear, and expected it any moment,—having by actual experience frequently got it, too, in the course of their variegated career. Needless to say that any question put to such folks is a rattler; still less needless to say that, when the question comes from an S.L.P. man, it is a down-right “disturber and breaker-up.” The audience is thereby put on its guard, it is enlightened, the stomach of its mind ceases to be in condition to swallow the sugar-coated pills of Fraud. From that moment the speaker’s occupation is gone; he only has the claque that he brought along with him.

The Kangaroo Social Democracy is wise in the manner of all fools: It does the right thing in the wrong way. By resolving to protect its meetings, and admitting that the Socialist Labor Party questions “disturb and break them up,” it has defeated its own purpose.

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