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EDITORIAL

A QUESTION FROM THE PACIFIC SLOPE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE below letter—a burning coal from the furnace—throws too brilliant a light upon the field, and upon many a nook and corner thereof, to allow it to transpire only to the limited extent that letters transpire through the Letter Box answer that they call for. Here it is—only suppressing its writer's name, not having his consent to publish the same:

Sacramento, Cal., June 5, 1903.

Editor *Daily People*, New York—

Dear Sir: I am a Trades Unionist and, of course, a workingman, and as a workingman I am very much interested in the movement which claims to be doing battle for workingmen. Now, since you are the Editor of a Socialist paper in which you carry a Letter-Box, which I have seen in the issue of May 17, '03, this being the only issue which has ever come {come?} to my notice, I take the liberty to ask you some questions.

In an answer to J.H., New York, you use the term “bore from within,” and your advice seems to be, not only bore from within, but bore in every possible manner. Now, the term “from within” or “without” is Greek to me.

Now, what I want to know is this: Does it mean that the Socialists shall do as they do in Sacramento, that is, get into the union; use every honest or corrupt means to become officers; and, having gotten the office which they are after, **BORE US TO DEATH BY INSISTING THAT WE ALL READ AND STUDY THE APPEAL TO REASON IN OUR MEETINGS?** Or does it mean that they should try and disrupt the union, if they fail to become officers? Or does it mean that the Socialists shall bore themselves into the union, as they have done, and then proceed to bore us to death by telling us that we are not getting enough wages, and calling us cowards for not going out on strike?

Now, kind sir, do not run away with the idea that we are getting more wages than {than?} we need. No; on the contrary, our wages are far too small. Besides, myself and my fellow workmen would gladly go on strike tomorrow morning if we could see our way clear to WIN. But there is where the shoe is tight. The question is not, Shall we strike? but, Can we win? That is the point which is overlooked by our good friends the Socialists.

They never ask themselves the question, Will the strike be a success or will it be a failure?

Again, those who are compelled to work all the year at small wages, barely making a living, the word successful means only a slight increase, say 10 cents per day or \$30 per year, which is really lost before it is won, say the strike lasts a month. While an unsuccessful strike means simply starvation.

No, kind sir, I am not a scab. Neither will I follow the blind leader who is shouting: "Strike! Strike!" and who would eventually lead me into the wild desert, where both of us would become prey for the coyotes of the Employers' Union, who happen to have the best appetite for my labor at the smallest possible price.

Now, I have probably bored you to death with this letter. But I am so interested in the uplifting of myself and my fellow workers that I hardly know when I have said enough. I wish to say that I am not a Socialist, although I am a steady reader of the *Appeal to Reason* for over a year. And, while I will admit that there are some witty little articles in it, so far, I have not seen any logical solution of the Labor Problem. There is something for which I cannot find a name for which I am looking.

I read with interest the copy of the *Daily People* of the 17th ult., which lies nearest to my heart of any reform paper I have seen so far. Please send me a sample copy, and when pay day comes around it is my intention to subscribe for it.

Hoping that I have not intruded too much on your time, I am yours for the betterment of the workers.

Is not this, indeed, a burning coal from the furnace of the camp of the working class, groping instinctively for light, and yet beset, like a traveler through a swamp, by vermin and false swamp-lights?

The term "boring from within" had its origin with a German paper called the *New Yorker Volkszeitung*, which is owned by a private corporation. The paper claimed to be Socialist and in the interest of Labor. It was neither. Whipped in line by the Socialist Labor Party, it could be kept in line only for a while. The S.L.P.'s incorruptibility interfered with the paper's business. This business consisted partly in hush-money that it received from the Labor Fakir, who manufactured strikes to suit one employer at the expense of another, or lived on bogus label agitations, etc. The S.L.P. attitude disturbed the Fakir. The S.L.P. had tried to educate the rank and file in the unions. That did not suit the Fakir. Such education threatened his crooked existence; it was something new to him. He had been accustomed to the

“*Volkszeitung* Socialists” style of educating the rank and file—lying low, whooping it up for the Fakir, and talking Socialism through their hats. The S.L.P. style would never do, and the Fakir then “shut down” upon the S.L.P. The result was that the S.L.P. started a Socialist Trades Union—the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance—and with its press and its spoken propaganda the Party stood by the workingman in all his workingman’s demands, whether he was in an old style pure and simple union, or in the S.T. & L.A., or in no union whatever—but waged war to the knife upon the Labor Fakir. This gentry, seeing the *Volkszeitung* corporation held in the leash of the S.L.P., then began to withdraw their support from the paper; its business began to decline; and, rather than live in poverty for a decent cause, for a clean workingman’s movement, it preferred to share the Judas pence of the Labor Fakir. Its choice being taken, it opened fire in 1898 upon the S.L.P. with an article announcing in favor of “boring from within.” A year later the S.L.P. and the *Volkszeitung* parted company.

What “boring from within” means our correspondent has learned from personal contact with the thing. If, instead of his experience being that the “borers from within,” who are justly nauseating him, try to force upon him the *Appeal to Reason*, his experience were that they try to force upon him the *Volkszeitung* or the *Worker*, both the private property of the same corporation, that is, just as the *Appeal to Reason*, private property, he then would have the situation in the East pat. Aided by the above account of the origin of the term “bore from within” our correspondent, together with the thousands who are making his experience, will understand exactly what the term means—and what class of people have the term as their motto.

“Boring from within” means to act as agents to secure subscribers for privately owned papers, that sail under the flag of Socialism with as much right and for similar purposes as pirates sail under false colors,—how false the Socialist colors are, our correspondent gives unsolicited testimony to: He is “a steady reader of the *Appeal to Reason* for over a year,” but is not a Socialist, and has “not seen any logical solution of the Labor Problem” in the paper, which is just the language of those who read any other “boring from within” Socialist paper.

“Boring from within” means to hold irrational language generally, and

traitorous language on the matter of strikes in particular—as our correspondent has ascertained, and was ascertained by the unhappy coal miners.

“Boring from within” finally means to convey the idea that Socialism is either insanity, or tomfoolery, or crookedness,—as may be judged from our correspondent’s actually believing that the crew of *Appeal to Reason* agents and “Strike!” ranters, whom he has to do with, are Socialists.

“Boring from without, and from within, and from any side possible,” means to hold up unflinching the logical standard of the Working Class; never to treat with that class’ foes except to expose them; never to be seen in the company of those foes except to smite them, and thus, by the steadfast holding up of the clear beacon of Socialism, aid those thousands of workingmen, who are groping in the dark for emancipation, to “find that something for which they cannot yet find a name”—and recognize it and grapple it to their hearts when they find it.

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