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EDITORIAL

A FREE BALLOT.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE New York State Republican Convention adopted this week a resolution that is in itself a liberal education on the essentials of a free ballot. The title of the resolution {is,} “Negro disfranchisement in the South.” Any title will do.

What is a free ballot? There are people who pretend that political matters are very profound. They try to make them so profound that nobody can fathom them. In and of itself there is nothing profound or complicated in the matter. The same obvious principle that prevails in matters of contracts prevails with the ballot. A contract is not considered binding unless it is entered freely, and a contract is not considered entered freely if entered into by one of the parties under a misconception created in his mind by the other party. The man who cultivates the ignorance of another man on the hidden treasures of the latter’s field, and then makes a contract with him for the sale of the field at an ordinary price, can not hold the latter. The latter did not enter into a free contract. He was forced to it by the violence of the ignorance that the other party cultivated in his brain. Apply the principle to the ballot. Can there be said to be a free ballot anywhere in the land, as far as the bulk of the working class is concerned?

Let none say that a man is not necessarily ignorant if he is not a Socialist. Surely not. Our capitalist editors may be very learned and so may the capitalist politicians, but do they or do they not cultivate ignorance on the Social Question? None who reads or hears them can deny the fact. Even after a man has been clearly explained Socialist economics he may dissent, and his ballot may be a free ballot tho’ cast for capitalism. But the workingmen who are lied to by the capitalist papers upon the subject of wages, who are kept knowingly in false expectations, from whom all effort is made to keep the slightest scrap of anti-capitalist information,—such

workingmen, and they are in the majority, when they vote, vote in ignorance; their ignorance is cultivated by the class in whose favor the vote is cast. Such a ballot is not free; such a ballot is slave—and that it is counted only aggravates the case; it is stolen by the capitalist class.

The only difference in the South is that the ruling class of that section of the country are still at the Russian stage of tyranny—brutal force; while the Northern ruling class have developed beyond that and are at the stage of sneak force.

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