

EDITORIAL

## PURE AND SIMPLEDOM.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**A**N article entitled “What is a ‘Pure and Simple’ Labor Organization?” by Comrade Charles H. Corregan, and arriving at the conclusion that the I.W.W. is a Pure and Simple Union, will be found in another column of this issue.<sup>1</sup> The comrade recognizes that his views are not in accord with the majority of the Party, but in a tone of apologetic warning he asks, Suppose the majority is in error? There is no apology needed. Minorities often are right. Indeed, were it not for minorities society would stand stock still. The Revolutionary Fathers were in the minority; the Abolitionists were in the minority; the Socialist Labor Party itself is to-day but a trifling minority of our people. The enlightenment of the S.L.P. on this head combines with its staunch democracy ever to secure respectful hearing to and serious consideration of minorities within its ranks, without thereby disturbing, but ever maintaining that self-imposed discipline, or order, without which progress is out of question.

The discussion of what is pure and simple Unionism is timely. The contention of the comrade that the I.W.W. is a pure and simple Union is pivoted upon the principle that the recognition of the “necessity of combined political and economic action” is the all-sufficient point to consider in order to take a Union “out of the category of ‘pure and simple’ Unions”.—The principle is false.

The geology, so to speak, of the Labor Movement furnishes an abundance of sparkling specimens upon which to establish correct theories on the subject of “pure and simpledom.” These specimens disprove that the unity of politics and economics is in and of itself a determining factor as to the quality, the revolutionariness or the reactionariness, the class-consciousness or the pure and simpledom of a Union. Let us contemplate two of these specimens—the Australian and the British Trades

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<sup>1</sup> [To be appended at a later date.—R.B.]

Union.

Both in Great Britain and in Australia there are Trades Union organizations that recognize “the necessity of combined political and economic action”, in Great Britain to a less general extent, in Australia absolutely; in Great Britain, owing to a recent decision of the Registrar, commented upon in our “London Letters”, the Trades Union organizations in question find themselves hampered in their political activity, nevertheless they have set up their own political party, in Australia the Trades Unions body operates unhampered on the political field. Accordingly, in Great Britain, under the name and style of {“Labor Representation Committee”, in Australia under the name and style of<sup>2</sup>} “Labor Party”, these Trades Unions enter the political field, set up their own candidates, and assert “the necessity of combined political and economic action”. Are these Trades Unions not pure and simple? None will deny they are. Their program approves them such. Needless to go into detailed proof. Short as the history of the British Trades Union political party is, its record is ample; as to the older Australian specimen, its record is still ampler. Suffice it to condense their principles and program. In point of principle, they hold the capitalist system of society to be standard; in point of program, they aim at “harmonious relations between Capital and Labor”, they aim at establishing a permanent modus vivendi between the two.—The acme of pure-simplicity!

Neither the recognition of the necessity of political action, nor of economic action, nor yet of “combined political and economic action” is a determining factor as to the quality of a Union. The determining factor is the PURPOSE to which such action—economic, political or combined—is put, together with the reasoning by which that purpose is determined upon. It is this purpose, the overthrow of the capitalist system, coupled with the reasoning that harmony between Capital and Labor is impossible, that “took the S.T. & L.A. out of the category of ‘pure and

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<sup>2</sup> [Bracketed insert from *Weekly People*, January 20, 1906. Also see DDL’s “Letter Box” answer to C.R., New York, January 14, below:

[C.R., NEW YORK.—Correctly guessed. That passage in the editorial “Pure and Simpledom” was bungled by compositors and proof-reader. The name of the Trades Union party in Great Britain is “Labor Representation Committee”; “Labor Party” is the name of the Australian Trades Union political reflex. In the {second} sentence{,} third {fourth} paragraph, 15th line: “Accordingly, in Great Britain, under the name and style of ‘Labor Party’ these Trades Unions enter the political field,” two lines were dropped. It should read: “Accordingly, in Great Britain, under the name and style of ‘Labor Representation Committee,’ in Australia, under the name and style of ‘Labor Party,’ these Trades Unions enter the political field,” etc. The correction will be made in the *Weekly*.—R.B.]

simple' Unions". The identical test does the same for the I.W.W. The declaration in the Preamble of the I.W.W. that "the working class and the employing class have NOTHING IN COMMON"; the conviction expressed that "there can be NO PEACE" so long as the iniquities born of capitalism continue; the conclusion that "between these two classes a struggle must go on until THE TOILERS COME TOGETHER ON THE POLITICAL, AS WELL AS ON THE INDUSTRIAL FIELD, AND TAKE AND HOLD THAT WHICH THEY PRODUCE BY THEIR LABOR"—this process of reasoning, leading to the clearly expressed purpose of the overthrow of capitalism, stamp{s} the I.W.W. a class-consciously, revolutionary Union, and takes it bodily "out of the category of 'pure and simple' Unions." These are facts. They are facts that can not be overthrown. These facts are so solid that they give no foundation for the conclusion that the closing clause of the sentence—"a struggle must go on until all the toilers come together on the political as well as on the industrial field, and take and hold that which they produce by their labor through an economic organization of the working class WITHOUT AFFILIATION WITH ANY POLITICAL PARTY"—is "a non-political affiliation clause", in the sense that the I.W.W. denies the "necessity of combined political and economic action", or even ignores such necessity. Such a construction of the closing clause, that we have underscored above, is false construction—doubly so. It is false construction in that it does violence to the clause immediately preceding it, and which demands the unity of the toilers "on the political as well as the economic field" as a condition precedent for ending the class struggle; and it is false construction in that it wrenches the clause out of its own context, thereby depriving it of its deep sociological sense—the fact that the political organization can not "take and hold" the plants of production, that the "taking and holding" and immediate administration of the Nation's industrial powers must be the work of {the} economic organization, ready to step in, or the "taking and holding" will not be done at all. Nor is the construction placed upon Haywood's action, ruling out of order a proposed amendment to bar from membership men who accept nominations from capitalist parties, and the action of the convention sustaining the ruling, a correct interpretation of the occurrence. The same ruling and action—after the rapidly approaching day shall have come, when only one party of Socialism shall be known and acknowledged in the land—would,

indeed, bear out the comrade's dark forebodings. By the light of the surrounding conditions at the time of the convention, the forebodings are unwarranted, however wise as a warning. The S.T. & L.A. delegation objected to the ruling, and voted against the chair. In view, however, of existing conditions, it desisted from then pushing the point any further, and thereby precipitating a clash on (of?) the S.L.P. and the S.P., with the prospect of a smash-up—the very thing that the pure and simple political Socialists, in league with the Gompersites, were making all possible manoeuvres to bring about. Class-conscious Unionism had gained a foot-hold as it had never had upon an actually national basis in the land. Nor did the S.T. & L.A. delegation think so poorly of its own literature as to expect no better fruits therefrom than the fruit that the trashy literature, which flows from Kangish and from pure and simple political Socialists, ripens.

The ship, that is nearing land, sees its destination at first only in rough outlines; as it approaches, details, not perceived before, and before unperceivable, break upon its ken; not infrequently closer quarters even alter the perspective. Harmful orthodoxy would that be on the part of the traveler who persisted in the first impressions, made by the first and still distant perspective. He would “land abroad”, in a land that has no existence. He would immolate Essence on the altar of Appearance. Combined political and economic action is not in and of itself the essence of class-conscious Unionism: however that may have seemed at one time, experience, closer quarters, has rearranged the perspective. At one time mere economic activity seemed the height of revolution: experience has shown that economic action may be a caricature of bourgeoisism; then it seemed that political and economic action combined would fill the bill: the specimens furnished by Australia and Great Britain demonstrate that the combination may be the tool of rankest reactionaryism. Schooled by experience, the essence of class-conscious Unionism is found behind the external means of economic and political action; it is found to reside in the understanding of the irrepressible nature of the class struggle and the determination to end it. The correct manner, the “how”, can not remain foreign to such a body. In point of essence, accordingly, the I.W.W. is not a “pure and simple” Union; in the important point of tactics, the manner how to realize its ideal, the I.W.W. is, to say the least, on the highroad to perfection. Whether

whatever further steps may yet be needed will or will not be taken, depends upon whether the most advanced elements to-day in the Labor Movement will or will not fortify the new body with their experience, their earnestness, their integrity.

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