

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 7, NO. 242.

NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 1907.

ONE CENT.

CORRESPONDENCE

AS TO POLITICS.

(By Charles Rice, New York)

January 23

THE controversial columns "As to Politics" have proved intensely interesting and suggestive even to workers outside of the ranks of the Socialist Labor Party or the Industrial Workers of the World. Quite a notable element, ever growing numerically, of the Socialist party men, members as well as non-members (the writer among them) are on the point of turning a new leaf in Socialist theory and tactics. Many of us are disgusted with the untenable, double-faced hob-nobbing of the Socialist party organizations and its prominents (a la Hanford, Hoehn, etc.), with the A.F. of L., not to speak of campaigning methods frequently resorted to by the Socialist party in different States that nauseate by their stench of Rep-Dem vote-catching. We are now taking stock of our traditional parliamentary Socialism and are looking around us for new light.

I am confident that I voice the sense of a great number of Socialist party members and sympathizers in propounding the following questions for our especial benefit:

I.

What is the exact position of the *Daily People* on the question of so-called political action in connection with a class-conscious labor consolidation of the I.W.W. type? So far, unfortunately, we have not been able to cull from the columns of *The People* a DEFINITE and EXHAUSTIVE exposition of *The People's* attitude on this head, an exposition DEFINITE as to the terms involved (e.g. "political action") and as to practical steps to carry out that attitude. Let the Editor take the trouble to give an exhaustive statement of all that his position implies, taking care to DEFINE preliminarily EVERY DOUBTFUL, or involved, or ambiguous term or

expression, and assuming nothing for granted until he has covered THIS part of his work (i.e., definition) and he will have cleared the way for a much more effective and beneficial discussion of this question of the utmost importance to all wage slaves.

II.

Is the position taken by the *Daily People* on this question identical with that of the S.L.P. itself?

III.

This query is put here simply as a hint to the Editor to take account of it in formulating his answer to the first query, as the answer to the third is necessarily involved in the answer to the first. The platform of the S.L.P. states that “The time is fast coming when, in the *natural course of social evolution* (italics are mine), this (capitalist) system, through the destructive action of its failures and crises, on the one hand, and the constructive tendencies of its trusts and other capitalist combinations, on the other hand, will have worked out its own downfall,” and “We, therefore, call upon the wage workers of America to organize under the banner of the Socialist Labor Party into a class-conscious body, aware of its rights and determined to conquer them.”

In view of this, the following queries under this head are legitimate:

(a) *What* is there to conquer and from *whom* to conquer, if this system will *naturally* work out its own downfall?

(b) If some conquering has to be done, who will do it—the Socialist Labor Party or the I.W.W. (through a political organization of its own)?

(c) What shall we, in quest of new and certain light in our sea of doubts, meanwhile do? Shall we join the S.L.P., help build it up, get ourselves drilled for the final “conquering” and then disband and walk over to the political organization that the I.W.W. will have by that time evolved?

(d) Will the I.W.W. at all be likely to evolve such an organization if we persist in building up the S.L.P.? If we are to join the I.W.W. and to try to steer its course away from politics, that is from indorsing any existing Socialist political

organization, and at the same time band ourselves outside as a body of staunch S.L.P.-ites, then where will our I.W.W. political expression through an organization of its own come in?

(e) Shall we not join the S.L.P., but stay in the S.P. and try to do what we can to counteract the semibourgeois tendencies and dubious methods of the Bergers, Wilshires, and their ilk, and wait till the I.W.W. *will* work out its own political machinery for “taking” and afterwards “holding” the means of wealth-production and distribution, as we will have to at any rate; to disband, to strip ourselves of our S.L.P. or S.P. garments in order to don the full revolutionary dress suit of the I.W.W.?

CHAS. RICE.

[ANSWER TO I.]

A rapid sketch of the social evolution that underlies the word “political” may aid in understanding the different shades of meaning that the word conveys.

Genesis 2.24 proclaims this maxim: “therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife”; the same Genesis 3.16, proclaims this other maxim: “and thy desire shall be unto thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.”

The two maxims are obviously contradictory. They can not stand abreast of each other. They were not reflected by the same, they were reflected by different social stages. The first was reflected by an earlier, the second by a later social stage. At the earlier social stage a male of one gens marrying a female of another gens (marriage was not allowed within the same gens) went over to and was absorbed by his wife’s gens; at the later social stage it was the wife who left her own and passed over into her husband’s gens. At the earlier social stage inheritance was in the female line; at the later social stage it was in the male line. At the earlier social stage property was communal, at the later social stage it became private. Hand in hand with these changes went a series of institutional changes. “Government,” “administration,” or whatever name may be given that central guidance found indispensable in organization, was revolutionized. The original system, under which “government” rested upon the PEOPLE, not upon TERRITORY, was reversed.

“Government” resting upon TERRITORY, not upon the PEOPLE, reached the latter only through the former, only as they came within the territorial property demarkation. This change of institutional “government” was in keeping with the change that property had undergone. Natural enough the institutional change culminated in the building of cities and the establishment of class-rule. The word “political” has its root in the Greek word for CITY. For fuller information read Lewis H. Morgan’s *Ancient Society*. It furnishes the ethnic groundwork for Socialism, and at the same time sheds light upon terminology.

Obedient to its origin the word “political” has more than one application.

The word occurs, for instance, in the Socialist maxim: “The ‘political’ concept dominates the economic aspirations of a Union; hence no Union is worth the name whose economic aspirations are not dominated by Socialist thought.” Slovenly users of words have misconceived the meaning of the word “political” in the maxim; self-misled, they have come to cite the maxim as follows: “The political organization must dominate the economic organization.” This is nonsense. Political organization neither does nor can dominate economic organization. Such a notion is at war with the Morgan-Marxian materialist conception of history and the error leads to grave false steps in tactics. The word “political” in the maxim, as correctly quoted, means the conception that a Union may have regarding the social structure. A Union whose conception of society is capitalistic will find its economic aspirations dominated accordingly. Ignorant of the wage slave nature of its membership, it will seek to deal with the employer as peers. At first blush this view also may be considered at war with the Morgan-Marxian principle of the material basis of thought. There is no contradiction. It is a fact, insisted upon by these scientists, that thought lingers behind newly formed and forming material bases. Indisputable is the fact that most of the economic efforts on the part of workingmen to-day—despite their material conditions, which no longer furnish a basis for “conservatism”—are conservative. The circumstance is only additional argument why such efforts are fatedly ineffective. On the other hand, a Union whose conception of society enlightens it on the wage slave status of its membership, together with the rest that thereby hangs, such a Union will not circumscribe itself to conservative aspirations. There is no economic organization without a “political” concept, consciously or

unconsciously. The word “political” in that connection has no reference to voting. It simply means conception appertaining to social structure. In identical sense, the word “political” recurs in the term “political economy.”

The word “political” occurs also in the expressions “political government,” or the “political State,” etc. In these connections the word “political” is the equivalent of “class rule.” “Political government” means class rule government. The social theory of Anarchy (the term is used in its strictly technical sense, as given by Anarchists themselves) presupposes government to be identical with class rule, or despotism. The theory is based upon a myth. It is not the myths of the Bible only that ethnology overthrows. It also overthrows the myths of Anarchy. Man appears on the stage of traceable or inferable history in organized society, and with government. Government was then wholly compatible with freedom. (See the address *Reform or Revolution*, pp. 6–9.) The social evolution and revolutions that culminated in the overthrow of the mother right, the rise of private property, inheritance in the male line and territorial institutions, divided society into economic classes; government lost its former character of a function in co-operation, it became a means of oppression by property-holders. The building of cities being the culmination of the external development, government became “political.” Thus “political government” means “class rule government,” the “political State” means a social order reared upon the class system.

Finally a third order of connection, in which the word “political” recurs, appears in the term “political action.” Here “political” means neither “appertaining to social structure,” nor “class rule.” At the International Socialist Congress of Zurich, 1893, Landauer, an Anarchist of the bomb-throwing variety, demanded admission on the ground that the blowing up of capitalists was also “political action.” He used the word “political” in the first of the two senses just considered. He was denied admission, and the delegate of the Socialist Labor Party contributed his vote towards the motion that kept Landauer out, and preserved for the term the technically historic meaning it had acquired. “Political action” is a purely technical expression. It means the peaceful trial of strength in social issues. As such, the term is generic. It embraces a number of things, that is, all the things necessary for its realization. It embraces primaries; conventions, or any other established method for

the nomination of candidates for office in the “political,” that is, the “class rule” government; campaigning, that is, agitation in favor of the principles and, of course candidates, of the party: voting (not private voting) but voting in the same place where the opponents vote; finally, as a consequence, “parliamentary activity.”

None of these details of “political action” has a doubtful or double meaning, except the last—“parliamentary activity.”

Parliamentary activity is of two natures. One style of parliamentary activity takes place between opponents who have a common ground to stand upon. That sort of parliamentary activity is marked by “logrolling,” or “compromise.” It is the parliamentary activity of free traders with protectionists, gold standard with silver standard men, pro- and anti-Trust people—in short, elements who stand upon the common ground of the capitalist system. Another sort of parliamentary activity is that observed between opponents who have no common ground to stand upon. Such parliamentary activity is the only one permissible to the representatives of a party of Socialism in the parliament of a country, such as America, where feudalism is tracelessly abolished, and the two classes—Capitalist and Proletarian—face each other. Such parliamentary activity does not tolerate “logrolling.” Such parliamentary activity, wherever obtainable, is, to a great extent, the continuation, upon the much more widely heard forum of parliament, of the agitation and education conducted by such a party on the forum of the stump during the campaign. Such parliamentary activity preaches and demands the Revolution—the surrender of the Capitalist Class. Anything short of such activity by the elected candidates of a party of Socialism is “logrolling”; “logrolling” implies a common ground between the “logrollers”; consequently the “logrolling” Socialist must have shifted his ground to that of his capitalist opponent. Such a Socialist betrays the Working Class. (See *Flashlights of the Amsterdam Congress*, Addendum M., Review of the Dresden Convention, pp. 124–127.) A branch of what may be called “parliamentary activity” is the activity in executive offices. There also the principle above laid down is enforcible. Socialist incumbents may act only obedient to the principle that impossible is the attempt to represent two classes engaged in the conflict of the class war; that, consequently, they represent only one class—the Working Class.

Summing up “political action” by the revolutionary Working Class, the action means the endeavor to settle, by the peaceful method of trial of strength, the issue between the Working Class and the Capitalist Class. That issue demands the overthrow of the capitalist regimen. The overthrow of the capitalist regimen implies the razing to the ground that peculiar structure of government that arose with the rising of cities and from which it took its name—POLITICAL government, class rule government. The overthrow of the capitalist regimen, in turn, means the restoration of administrative co-operation in production (see Address on *The Preamble of the I.W.W.*{,} pp. 29-47.)

ANSWER TO II.

The discussion “As to Politics” started more than three months ago—*Daily People*, Nov. 23, 1906. It was started with a letter from John Sandgren, California, a non-Party man, opposing political action and proposing that the S.L.P. and the S.P. both “break up camp.” The same issue of *The People* contained *The People’s* answer. The principles, set up in that answer, are the principles that have been upheld throughout these more than three months.

That whatever member the S.L.P. may happen to put in charge of the editorial management of the Party’s English organ may fail to voice the Party’s views on this, or any other vital question that may spring up, is quite imaginable. UN-imaginable is that state of things under which such an S.L.P. Editor would not have been ousted long ago. The Party’s constitution, together with the strict discipline that it enforces, would have suspended the Editor of *The People* within 48 hours after his first misstatement of the Party’s position; and long before the discussion would have lasted three months and more, he would have been removed.

In view of this fact; in view of the further fact that not the slightest evidence of dissatisfaction has manifested itself on the part of the Party, but quite the reverse; the conclusion is justified that the position taken by *The People* in this question is the position of the S.L.P.

The word “identical” is here avoided because it is unnecessarily sweeping, although there is nothing to indicate that it would not be justified, and everything to warrant the belief that the word would fit the situation.

ANSWER TO III., (A).

What is there to conquer?—Economic freedom, which involves all other freedoms.

From whom?—From the ruling class.

It does not follow that, because the CAPITALIST system works out its own downfall, therefore class rule, will have ceased.

It may be a question whether we are now under the capitalist system proper. Much may be said on the side of the theory that, if we are not yet under a different system, we are fast tending towards it. The downfall of capitalism from the causes indicated in the S.L.P. platform, is by no means equivalent with the up-rise of the Socialist Republic. Readers of *The People* are recommended to read the booklet *Two Pages from Roman History*, especially the first of the “Two Pages” in the latter third of which this very subject is handled in detail. The country is now moving into a social system to which the name “Capitalism,” in its proper sense, is applying less and less. A monopoly period is now surging upward to which the designation “Plutocratic Feudalism” is the fitter term. It does not follow that, if the very Few are gathered on one side, and very Many are lumped on the other, the latter will necessarily swamp the former. They will do so only when they shall have understood their own revolutionary mission, and organized accordingly. Contrariwise—let the Working Class continue a sufficiently longer spell befuddled by the labor-lieutenants of the Capitalist Class; confused by the clatter of pure and simple political Socialists on the one side, and the shrieks of pure and simple Physical Forcists, on the other; periodically swamped by the floods of misinformation with regard to things and men; and perpetually the victims of such sinister characters as the “Man of the Furred Cap” in Eugene Sue’s master story “The Iron Trevet”; and let those within or in the suburbs of the Movement who are neither labor lieutenants of the Capitalist Class, nor pure and simple politicians, nor pure and simple clubbists, nor spreaders of false information, nor yet “Men of the Furred Cap,” persist in the apathetic course of philosophically standing by and looking on, and fatuously expect to see things straighten up, instead of contributing emphatic share towards order—then, whatever periods of senseless (senseless

because un-revolutionary and, therefore merely riotous) upheavals may betide, the Many will sink to the depths of serfs, actual serfs of a plutocratic feudal glebe.

There will be everything to conquer—and from whom to conquer it.

ANSWER TO III., (B).

Proceeding from the belief that the conquering will be done without the country having first to go through the ordeal of Plutocratic Feudalism—proceeding from that belief, the conquering will be done by the I.W.W., assisted, step by step, by a political party that blazons the Revolution; assisted, accordingly, by a body that expresses, in the only practical manner known, the civilized sentiment of the I.W.W. to seek a peaceful trial of strength.

What the name of that political Party will be it is now too early to know. What the leading characteristics of that Party will be—THAT is knowable to-day. That political Party must demand the unconditional surrender of the Capitalist Class; that Party must be aware of the fact, and its every act must be in accord thereto, that the necessary evolution, which has to precede the evolutionary crisis known as “revolution,” has already taken place in the womb of society in the shape of development and concentration of the means of production; consequently, that all talk about “evolution” as an excuse for bourgeois improvements, or “one thing at a time,” is born either of hopeless stupidity, or of designing corruption, or of a constitutional poltroonery, from any one of which the Revolution can only expect betrayal at the critical moment; that Party must be ONE thing only to all men, ONE thing in all latitudes and longitudes of the land—no perfidy to principle under the guise of “autonomy”; that Party must have room within its camp for all the desirable social elements whose occupation excludes them from bona fide membership in the I.W.W., and who attest their desirability, in point of sentiment and intellect, by standing unswervingly upon the class interests of the Working Class, and gladly submitting to the discipline such a Party requires; last, not least, and fundamentally to the above four features, that Party must recognize that the economic organization can no more be subject for “Neutral” treatment than the crew of a ship can be subject for “Neutral” treatment by the ship itself; that the Union, industrially organized and revolutionarily animated, is the embryo of future society,

the sole constituency of the Congress of the future, the fated supplanter of “political government,” hence the only available, and, withal, the all-sufficient physical power to enforce the Party’s program.

The only Party that to-day promotes the I.W.W. program is the Socialist Labor Party. How things will shape themselves—whether the clear-headed and upright elements in the Socialist party will be able to attain control of and cleanse their own party, and in that case whether that cleansed party will merge in the S.L.P., or, jointly with it, perfect a new Party, under a new name; or whether those clear-headed and upright elements in the S.P. will fail within their own party, be absorbed in the S.L.P., and they, who alone impart whatever fiber and respect the S.P. to-day possesses and enjoys, having withdrawn and the old S.P. having inevitably collapsed in consequence, the I.W.W. will accept the S.L.P. or the new-organized Party as its political reflex; or, as a third hypothesis, whether in any event the I.W.W. will prefer to cast its own political reflex, disentangled from all annoying reminiscences of past political conflicts—“all that, forsooth, rests on the knees of the gods.”

ANSWER TO III., (C) and (E).

These two questions are too interdependent for separate treatment.

Since the founding of the I.W.W., Fellow Worker Eugene V. Debs wrote a number of articles on the merits of the new organization, and the wrongfulness of the hostile posture held towards it by men of his own party, the S.P. Among these articles, two—the one originally published in the *Miners’ Magazine*, Oct. 25, 1905, and the other published in *The Worker*, July 28, 1906, both of which were reproduced in *The People*—are especially to the point. Debs ridiculed with pungent satire the “peculiar logic” that led those S.P. men to set up the theory of “boring from within” the A.F. of L. and expect success, notwithstanding they justly reject the idea of “boring from within” the Democratic and Republican parties; and he correctly stigmatized association with the A.F. of L. as “contamination.” Debs was left unanswered. The only retort that would have turned the edge of the points he made—that retort the A-F-of-L first S-P-next men who dominate the S.P. did not dare to come out with. That retort was: “If you consider ‘peculiar’ the logic of

expecting success from 'boring from within' the A.F. of L., and are of the conviction that association with the A.F. of L. is 'contamination,' by what process of reason are you expecting success from 'boring from within' the S.P.?"

This retort embodies the answer to III., (c) and (e).

An organization is a structure. A steamer constructed for an excursion boat can not be transformed into a battle ship. No amount of pruning, nursing and grafting will turn a sour apple tree into a tree that will bear oranges. The S.P. was not a scheme—though schemers may have joined it, and did. It arose obedient to a principle—the wrong principle that political action is all-sufficient, the obverse of which is the denial of the essential function of the Union is the achievement of the Social Revolution. Such a political structure can not be "bored from within." The nuisance can be abated only by its own decay—which has visibly set in. The joining of, or staying in it by fresh and sound elements could have for its effect only to retard the politico-geologic and atmospheric conditions that doom the false political structure to decline and fall.

Otherwise with regard to the S.L.P. Whatever defects there may be in the Party, these defects can only be of secondary nature. They are not structural. On the fundamental issue of Unionism the Party is sound to the core. Those who would not waste their efforts should join it. By doing so, not only will they not retard, they would promote the politico-geologic and atmospheric conditions that will ripen the well rounded, full-orbed revolutionary movement.

Should the third of the three hypotheses, considered under Answer III. (b), come to pass, then, as stated in the answer to the first Sandgren letter in this discussion, "the S.L.P. will 'break up camp' with a shout of joy, if a body merging into its own ideal can be said to 'break up camp.'"

ANSWER TO III., (d).

The bulk of the answer under this head has been given under the heads of the answers to III., (b), (c), and (e)—at least indirectly.

More than once has the remark been heard that it was unfortunate for the normal growth and development of the I.W.W. that there were two rival parties of Socialism in the field. Quite possibly Sandgren's position has its roots in that

experience. To the obvious fact of the retarding effect upon the I.W.W. of the rivalry of these two parties probably is due his wish that they both “break up camp”; and probably hence, and not due to any conscious objection to political action, he has unwittingly flown to the extreme of the theoretical rejection of political action altogether.

However this may be, vain are all tears over facts. The only wise thing to do is to see the facts squarely in the face.

The two rival parties are in existence. Their rivalry proceeds from different conceptions regarding the function of the Union, and, inferentially, regarding the function of political action. The conception of the one, the S.L.P., tallies with that of the I.W.W.; the conception of the other, the S.P., is at variance with that of the I.W.W. Inevitable was the experience that members of both parties should find themselves in the I.W.W.—members of the S.L.P., graduates from the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance, entering the I.W.W. as ducks take to a mill-pond; and members of the S.P. segregating into that party’s component elements: one element, like ducks that had been hatched out by hens, fraternizing on and in their common element with their newly-found brothers from the S.L.P.; the other element, like hens who had hatched out ducks, cackling and fluttering and scolding, incensed at a thing that is contrary to their nature.

A comprehensive grasp of all these facts, and these confronting conditions, dictates the conclusion that the growth and full-orbed development of the I.W.W. could only be benefited, indeed, will be mightily subserved, by multiplying the “ducks” for the I.W.W. pond. Ducks are more naturally hatched by their kind: henneries are less safe. The S.L.P. is to-day the hatchery of revolutionists, and of the propagandists of the aims and methods of the revolution. Wisdom may be relied upon, in the fullness of time, to dictate the I.W.W.’s political expression—an expression that will materialize under one or other of the three hypotheses advanced under Answer to III., (b).—ED. THE PEOPLE.]

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded August 2009

slpns@slp.org