

ARTICLE

THO' DODGING, CAUGHT.

The *Volkszeitung* and Its Impudence Nailed Fast by Itself.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE important matter of a Socialist political party's control of its press having come up in scores of ways in these columns, and the *Volkszeitung*, together with its English poodle, *The Worker*, having been held up with uncontrovertible proofs as the horrible, aye, the absurd example of a privately owned Socialist party press, the *Volkszeitung* found itself finally compelled to make some kind of an answer. It does so in its issue of the 1st instant in a many-columned article. The "answer" looks for all the world like the coon, that, smoked out of its hiding place, rushes forth into the open, frantic and bewildered; tries to bite,—and is clubbed down senseless.

It was stated and proved in these columns that, from the editors down, everyone on the *Volkszeitung* and *Worker* is an employee, not of the Social Democratic party, but of a private corporation, the *Volkszeitung* Corporation; that all these employees are dependent for their places and their living upon the corporation; that the corporation has it in its power to admit what members of that party it chooses, and to keep out those it does not like. It was shown how the party's policy could be, and in this instance was dominated by a corporation. That such a paper can not be a safe mouthpiece of a Socialist political party is clear; and the contrast was shown with the Socialist Labor Party that owned and controlled its press absolutely. What answer does the *Volkszeitung* make? Here is the principal passage of the "answer":

"One of the most favorite prescriptions to meet the solution of this difficult task [the protection of a Socialist paper] consists in the proposition that a Socialist paper shall belong neither to one person nor to an Association but to

the 'whole party.' That sounds quite plausible, especially to those who in this matter have as yet no experience. But we need not go far to prove that a paper, which, theoretically, belongs to the 'whole party,' belongs, in fact, only to those who happen to have it in hand, and who figure as representatives of the party. If these are so minded to keep the paper in their own hands, even against the will of the party; or if they are not minded to edit the organ the way the party wishes, there is hardly any means to compel their obedience. How the thing is done we see best illustrated in the English organ of the old S.L.P. There can surely not be the slightest doubt to-day any longer that the original majority of the old S.L.P. looks upon the editorial management of the paper as a direct act of treason to that party. They have so expressed themselves through their most prominent mouthpieces. It might be objected to at this juncture that if the majority of the party upholds the attitude of the paper, whether out of ignorance or out of lack of understanding, it is nevertheless the majority that rules. But that is in seeming only. In point of fact matters are so that if the schemers were to allow the discontented and those who have seen through the purposes of the men in power to carry their agitation into the broad circles of the party, then in a short time a rebellion would break out, and a strong majority of the members would throw overboard the present Editor and Manager. But even this only in theory. We have not the slightest doubt—and we shall yet see the sight—that even then those in power will find means and ways to keep the paper in their own hands. But they don't let it come so far. A watchful eye is kept on the membership. Wherever and whenever an opposition begins to stir itself, suspension and expulsion follows. From the individual and from whole Sections the power is taken away to make their influence effective with voice or vote. Thus we see to-day the strongest Sections, aye, whole States, thrown out of the old S.L.P.—but the paper remains in the hands of the schemers to the greater honor and aid of Capitalism.”

Not bothering about the stack of silly falsehoods regarding the way the S.L.P. is conducted, or the “strong Sections and States thrown out,” the argument amounts to this: No Socialist political party should be trusted with its own paper. The argument is not that the S.L.P. is a particularly wicked thing, or particularly unfit. That would be no argument. Even the sleepy *Volkszeitung* realizes that. The argument cites the particularly “wicked and unfit S.L.P.” merely as an illustration. It says expressly: “We need not go far to prove that a paper, which, theoretically, belongs to the 'whole party' belongs, in fact, only to those who have it in hand, and who figure as the representatives of the party.” The argument is against any and all party-ownership. So that the party representatives may be trusted with the party's policy, campaigns, etc., but not with the press. Seeing, however, that its press is the most powerful agitational weapon of a party,

and its best medium for upholding its policy, it follows that the *Volkszeitung* Corporation holds that its party may toy with the lesser weapons, but that the more important weapon must be held over the party's head, in private hands, to knock it down with if necessary.—And this is just the theory we have maintained the *Volkszeitung* goes by, and the positive danger it is to its party. The *Volkszeitung's* “answer” proves our point against it.

But the smoked-out coon of a *Volkszeitung*, in jumping out of its hiding place, is even more demented than the passage quoted above would indicate. “In vino veritas,” is the common saying: and it seems however that in “smoked-out” there is lots of truth also. After some general twaddling, indulged in after the passage above translated, the *Volkszeitung* lets out the following gigantic cat from its corporation bag:

“So that we may, with the easiest conscience, maintain that the *Volkszeitung* and ITS SEVERAL PUBLICATIONS are in every sense STRICTLY UNDER THE CONTROL OF THOSE GERMAN MEMBERS of the New York party who know what they are at.” [The underscoring is ours.]

We shall pass by the preposterousness of the idea that a corporation made up extensively as is the *Volkszeitung* corporation, of usurious money-lenders, small retail grocerymen, pluck-me-stores{-}keeping employers, lager beer vending Anarchists, sick and death benefit stiffs and such other tax-paying middle class folks, to say nothing of run-away German embezzlers and other German fishy characters, are the proper material to entrust with a Socialist political party's press. No doubt such folks “know what they are at.” That their class instincts are neither a reliable nor a desirable rudder for a Socialist movement is elemental. Preposterous, however, as the claim is on the part of such an element to be the proper custodians of a Socialist paper, such claim does not begin to compare with the impudence that the passage just quoted betrays in so many words. “The several publications” of the corporation, the article declares, are “in every sense strictly under the control of those German members of the New York party, who know what they are at.” Among these “several publications” is *The Worker*, an English organ of the Social Democratic party. Consequently, an English organ of the party, an organ, at that, that has a monopoly of their party's Eastern movement, such an English organ is “in every sense strictly under the control” of Germans! And the statement is

made with the cool assurance that that is the proper way.

For preposterousness and for impudence the attitude of the *Volkszeitung* corporation transcends everything in that line. In a German country there might be a color to the claim that a paper in English be "in every sense strictly under the control" of Germans. That such a state of things should also prevail in an English speaking country is a notion that can only take root in the head of idiots. The sane German would never advance such a proposition.

In making the preposterous declaration, the *Volkszeitung* unwittingly let out a cat. It is the ugly cat which caused early friction between it and the Socialist Labor Party. It is the cat of its stupid contempt for the Americans and silly superstition in favor of the German, as German. It is the cat of its abortive attempt to fasten upon the Socialist Labor Party of America the yoke of those Germans whom the corporation considered sufficiently degenerate to admit into its sacred precincts. It is the cat that calls to mind the virile course of the S.L.P. in successfully resisting the attempt to be thus subjugated by an offensively alien element, and the potent kick the S.L.P. gave the corporation, a kick that caused the *Volkszeitung* corporation's teeth to rattle, and from which it will never recover.

Interesting, in this connection, is the fact that the very "American" elements which the corporation justly used to point out as "hopelessly stupid, ignorant and corrupt," and which it stupidly considered as typical of the American—the Hanfords, the Nebens, the Salisburys, the Scrimshaws, the Borrowers, the Lees, the Max Hayes, the Harrimans, the Abbots, etc., etc.—are the very elements that are now meekly submitting to the yoke that the S.L.P. shattered, and are shoved forward by the *Volkszeitung* Corporation as its "American" manikins.

Tho' the *Volkszeitung* Corporation sought to dodge in its answer to the S.L.P. charge that it was a private corporation and as such unfit to be the owner of the press of a bona fide Socialist party, its own answer nails it fast. It is caught, and proves our case. What Socialist, unless he be a poltroon will continue to submit to such a galling yoke, and one maintained with such cool effrontery as the yoke of the picked *Volkszeitung* Corporation Germans who "know what they are at"?

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