

EDITORIAL

## WHAT IS PURE AND SIMPLEDOM?

By DANIEL DE LEON

**A** POST card, issued by the Pittsburg, Pa., Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators and Paper Hangers of America, informs its Pittsburg addressees as follows:

“Under our Constitution and By-laws we are not allowed to endorse any candidate for political office.

“But in case our Constitution and By-Laws permitted us to recommend and endorse candidates,

“We, the Brotherhood, would endorse the candidacy of  
JOHN F. STEEL FOR MAYOR.”

This Steel is a capitalist mayor.

There are those who hold that a union which excludes political discussion and participation is a “pure and simple” union.

That the notion is an error is proved by the postal card quoted above. The notion, besides being erroneous, is harmful in the extreme.

A pure and simple union is an organization that ignores the class struggle, or ignores the methods that the class struggle dictates for carrying it to a successful issue.

The postal card, quoted above, is but one of the most recent evidences of the fact that, whatever regulation an economic organization may adopt against “politics,” politics is so utterly inseparable from the organization that it will act politically, anyhow, as proved by the way the Painters and Decorators twist about. Seeing that politics is an unavoidable thing, it follows, furthermore, that the mere fact of openly admitting politics does not raise an economic organization above the quagmire of pure and simpledom.

A pure and simple union may denounce politics; a pure and simple union may

not denounce politics yet “exclude it from consideration.” As far as the subject of politics is concerned it is not the factor that determines the character of a union, whether it is “pure and simple” or not. The determining factor is how politics is looked upon, and this is, in turn, a consequence of the union’s clearness, or confusion, on the class struggle.

The classconscious union is an economic organization brought together for the purpose of overthrowing the capitalist system, and, consequently, so constructed as to fit the requirements of the case. Such a union will seek to unify the working class on the political, as well as on the economic field.

The pure and simple union, being an error, has as many varieties as Error allows. One variety considers itself the brother of the employer, and will join him on the political field against other employers; this is the Gompers-Mitchell variety. Another variety denies that the employer is the brother of the employe, but, his mind being full of hot air, seeks to blow up the employer; this is the Anarchist variety. Between these two varieties there are many sub-varieties, and all land into the contortions that the Pittsburg Painters and Decorators so graphically describe themselves in.

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

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[slpns@slp.org](mailto:slpns@slp.org)