

EDITORIAL

“DOING THINGS” IN WISCONSIN.

By DANIEL DE LEON

INTO the house of mourning of the Socialist party of the land much cheer—much of it forced—has been blown by the sweeping victory of the Social Democratic party of Milwaukee, whereby, from top to bottom, the municipal government is thrown into that party’s control. To him who takes a bird’s-eye view of the fact and its surroundings, the event suggests the suspicion that the patron Saint of Archbishop Sebastian G. Messmer, fervently invoked from the archbishop’s Milwaukee residence, listened to the archbishop’s prayer—and put Bergerism “in a hole.”

The Wisconsin Social Democratic party, Bergerism, in short, is so extreme (extreme in the direction of the radical bourgeois) a wing of the, one should say, sufficiently radical bourgeois Socialist party, that its allegiance to the S.P. is nominal only. The S.P.—its real head-center being here in New York, hence under the immediate guns of the Socialist Labor Party—feels constrained to insist upon the express recognition of the class struggle: Bergerism ignores the demand, altho’ embodied in the S.P. constitution; application for membership to the national party everywhere is for enrollment in the “Socialist party”: Bergerism turns its back upon that; it requires of applicants for enrollment that they sign, not an application for “membership in the Socialist party,” nor even in the “Social Democratic party,” but for membership in the “Social Democratic party of Wisconsin.” The internal features of Bergerism match its outward garb. It is the extreme and intensified logical conclusion of the essence of the national S.P.

Like the S.P., Bergerism is “pure and simple” political; more logical than the S.P., which visionarily ignores the necessity of the physical force backing of the ballot, Bergerism loudly advocates force; truer than the S.P. to the bourgeois breath in the nostrils of both, Bergerism conceives of no force other than the military, and

it frankly summons the workers to arm themselves; finally, more consistent than the S.P. to the bourgeois conceptions that dominate both, Bergerism, a true disciple of Edward Bernsteinism of Germany, brands all Socialist demands as “radical declamation,” relegates them to the rear, and throws its main, if not its whole, strength upon reforms—municipalization; cheap water, gas, fares; lower taxes; lower prices; “a square deal for all”; etc.; etc.

It goes without saying that, if the S.P. is utopian, Bergerism is utopianism sublimated. In Germany, where the revolutionary Socialist Movement preceded and far outran bourgeois radical aspirations,—in such a country, revolutionary Socialism “blanketed” the bourgeois radicals, and has compelled them to fall in line, though it be for a time only, under the banner of Socialism; in such a country Socialist chieftains are and remain captains: they can and do captain bourgeois reforms in the interest of Socialism. Otherwise here in America. Altho’ it may not be doubted that Victor L. Berger and some of his immediate lieutenants sincerely aim at the overthrow of, and would gladly dethrone capitalism, it does not follow from that that Bergerism shares the aim and sentiments. Far otherwise.

In America, a political party whose flag gives “Socialism” to the agitated, electricity-surcharged air, whatever may be the demands of such a political party, whether immediate or remote, must come equipped with the physical force that Socialism requires. That physical force, the only available one, is the integrally industrial organization of the useful occupations of the land. Such a political party, if it does not come in that all-essential panoply, can triumph at the polls only to its own ruin. In America, such a political party, being, by the very law of its own existence, in the nature of a cave of Adullam, an aggregation of discontents, severally rooted in contradictory class interests, carries within it all the dynamite necessary to explode, not the existing system, but itself. The only thing that can prevent the explosion is partial triumphs: that leaves open the door for the subterfuge of “not yet being entrusted with the full powers to carry out its promises.” The shelter of that subterfuge Bergerism has so far enjoyed. Its complete triumph now strips Bergerism of the shelter.

But not Bergerism only is “in a hole”: Archbishop-Messmerism is bound, as a consequence, eventually to share the hole with Bergerism, a hole dug by the

hearkened prayers of the archbishop himself to his patron Saint.

Socialism can only profit by the exposure of the false tactics adopted in its behalf. The more conspicuous the exposure, all the more effective the object lesson. Bergerism, no doubt, but not Socialism will explode by the explosion of promises impossible of execution, like of the “lowering of prices” by municipal ordinances, and “a square deal” to all classes; or of promises that kick each other in the stomach, like “the lowering of taxes to the taxpayer” and the simultaneous “raising of wages” in municipalized plants. Socialism, which Archbishop-Messmerism meant to bury by exposure, will rise triumphant from the explosion, now imminent in Milwaukee, which will blow up Bergerism and, for that very reason, Archbishop-Mesmerism, if not along with it, still eventually, if not sooner.

Things ARE being done in Wisconsin. Cheers to the doers!

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