

The passing of De Leon

The death of Daniel De Leon in America recalls the controversy over so-called Direct Action by the working class. Joining the S.L.P. when it was nominally, as well as actually, a reform party, De Leon also affiliated with the corrupt Knights of Labour, and as a result of the secession of some elements the Socialist Trades and Labour Alliance was formed to act in co-operation with the S.L.P. But a union of opposing elements could not succeed. In spite of the claim that by economic unity political unity would also be established, a split soon took place, and the Socialist (!) Party of America was formed.

In 1905 “Industrial Unity” was again the cry, and once more it was urged that by uniting economically, political harmony would be secured.

De Leon, Debs and other political enemies came together in the I.W.W., which taught that Industrial Unionism would establish Socialism. Politics was but a reflex or an afterthought, so to speak. Anarchists as well as “Socialists”, reformers as well as others, came together in the Industrial Workers of the World. Some of them believed in politics, while others did not.

Such fictitious unity could not last, and soon it was found that, instead of uniting, it made those it embraced more divided than ever. It was not long before Debs and his “Socialist” Party friends were outside the I.W.W. Soon arose the question of what Industrial Unionism meant, some contending that politics were unnecessary and others that they might be useful, and so on.

The arrival of Wm. Hayward from jail soon caused a split among the unity-hunters of the I.W.W., and we were faced with two I.W.W.’s – one forced to give some vague recognition of the value of political action, and the other, embracing Hayward, Bohn, Ettor and Giavonetti, yearning for sabotage, physical force, and such moonshine.

The closing years of De Leon’s life were practically a sea of troubles on this “industrial action” question. One after another his lieutenants went over to the so-called Socialist party, or to the rival I.W.W. Frank Bohn, James Connolly, Trautmann (who has now come home to the I.W.W. fold), and even his own son, Solon De Leon, making tracks for that ark of confusion, the S.P. of A.

Verily the Industrialist rubbish spelt Nemesis for the S.L.P.

There is a lesson for the workers on this side of the Atlantic to leave the suicidal policy of Industrial Unionism severely alone.

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