

*Daniel De Leon*

## **Editorial: A Word to Our Friends**

Quite often we receive communications from friendly sources, protesting their allegiance to Socialism, expressing their admiration for our unflinching attitude, even, at times offering their services, but uniformly concluding with the expression of the opinion that the Socialist Labor Party should adopt “American methods.”

To nail is colors to the masthead; to state its programme in unmistakable language, and stick to it; to refuse to palter with a double tongue; to firmly resist all seductions to deal, dicker and bargain; to reject the tactics of the back-stairs; to persist upon marching straight upon the goal with steady, persevering and patient steps; to be satisfied with gradual, healthy growth, instead of being driven by a nervous itch for prompt success, that always ends disastrously; and to be wholly insensible to all feeling of shame at the comparative smallness of its numbers, but rather to weigh than to count votes at this stage of the movement—these are the methods of the Socialist Labor Party, and these are the methods claimed to be “un-American.”

Those who think this wise seem to imagine that our country rose from below the waters with the close of the Reconstruction days and the final chapter on the abolition of slavery and the saving of the Union. True enough, not infrequently allusions are heard to pre-rebellion days, but so shockingly uniformed are most of those who make such allusions, and so completely are they swayed by post-rebellion political policies that they mix the two inextricably.

Observation proves that all the methods, so frequently

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referred to as “American,” are simply the methods of our political parties after 1866. After that time, there was virtually no issue between the dominant parties. The one had irretrievably lost, the other had as irretrievably gained its point. The question or questions that had divided them were settled. Virtually, neither had any more reason to exist. But political parties, of all organizations, never disband after they have fulfilled their mission. The men who may have led the fray on the two sides of a great question may withdraw, but the machines remain, and they continue to be used by those into whose hands they may have fallen. The Democratic and Republican machines survived the issues that had engaged them down to 1866, and they strove to perpetuate their existence. Devilish as was the soul that had animated the Democratic machine before and down to 1866, the machine WAS animated by a soul; excellent as was the soul that had animated that of the Republican party before and down to, there was no further use for it after 1866. After that period, the spirits that had inspired and animated the two machines had fled, and only the empty hulks remained. In the endeavor of these to get the better of each other for purposes that were basely selfish, tactics, policies and methods were adopted that corresponded to the base ends in view. With each, it was only a question of pelf. Accordingly, the two “parties” wiggled together, their limbs confusedly interwoven like those of snakes in a lump; the means to their ends, seeing the grovelling nature of the ends they had in view, were deception—hence, and as a matter of course, their tactics abhorred all clear cut declarations; their courses were devious; subterfuges and trickeries were their favorites; and lastly “success,” immediate “success,” was a necessary thing to strive for, while smallness of numbers was tantamount to ruin. This is the political spectacle our people have been treated to since 1866; and this is a spectacle all parliamentary countries are treated to when no issues are up.

But for the same reason that this spectacle was natural after

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1866, it would have been unnatural, and in fact was not to be seen, before 1866, or at either of the two preceding great political epochs in our history. At all those three epochs—the one engaged with the establishment of the present Constitution, the one concerned with our territorial aggrandizement to the South, and the one that dealt with the question of chattel slavery and all that thereby hung—the methods now in vogue by the old parties and thought to be American *par excellence* were, as a matter of course, conspicuously absent. The methods then adopted were those, which, for similar reasons, are to-day adopted by the Socialist Labor Party; the programmes were clear cut and full, directness of purpose was the order of the day, and as to these respective parties to which the present Socialist Labor Party corresponds, the parties big with the next great social thought, they, like us, built on rocks, and eschewed the tin-kettle.

In America as in all other countries, the political methods are manly or cowardly, according as the issue may be either a high social question or the victory of spoils-hunters.

Those who talk of “American” as distinguished from “Socialist” methods limit the period of “Americanism” to the last 25 years; they confuse an incident, common to political and social contentions in all countries, with the essence; and when they fasten the brand of “American” upon that incident they do gross wrong to our country’s good name by rendering it synonymous with poltroonery—and that it certainly is not!

*The People*, Vol. III, No. 14. Sunday, July 2, 1893

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*A De Leon editorial transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the  
Official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.*

*Uploaded October 2002*