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EDITORIAL

Tactics

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More than one correspondent and visitor has expressed the opinion that our policy towards the farmer is injurious to the movement. The reason given is that the farmer is a very numerous class and that “at all previous epochs of our history” it was from the farmer class that the revolutionist hosts sprang. In view of the circumstance that this statement and conclusion are pregnant with fatal errors and that the one and the other are often repeated, let us devote a few lines to the subject.

It is false reasoning to say that, because the farmer, property-holding farmer class was conspicuously present and necessary in the Revolution and the Civil War, therefore it will be conspicuous and necessary in the impending conflict. Some 500 years ago the Indian was conspicuous and necessary in the movements, whatever they were, then going on in America. Does it follow from that that he must be equally conspicuous and necessary to-day? It is a prerequisite of its conspicuousness and necessity that a thing exist, at least in force. A hundred years ago and thirty years ago the small farmer class was such a force; a hundred years ago more than thirty years ago. To-day the small farmer class is an actual minority of the whole population; it, together with its urban counterparts—the small shop-keeper, etc.—and including the big capitalists are fewer than the wage workers. To conclude, from the role played by the small farmer generations ago, that he must play the same role now is to ignore basic facts and to tumble into error.

But, it may be, and is, argued in some quarters, Granted that the controlling power the small farmer was once he is no more; yet he constitutes quite a fraction of the population; why not get him in?

This opens the doors to a discussion of the whole philosophy of biology and sociology upon which Socialist tactics are built. To sum up:

The Socialist does not reject the small farmer or any other middle-class man; he does not even reject the capitalist; what he does reject are the “reforms” which the economic class interests of all such people push forward, and all of which are either

valueless to the working class or positively injurious. Now, the fact is, that no alliance has ever been suggested to Socialists by the middle or the upper capitalist classes that was not repulsive to the class interests of the working class. Our good will was never sought but at the cost of our class interests to the benefit of the classes that exploit us. Hence the posture of the S.L.P. is not one of repudiating the farmers or any such, but of repudiating their, to us, harmful class measures. Whenever they or any of the members of the labor-fleecing, i.e., labor-employing classes, have been found enlightened enough to tear themselves loose from their own perverse class interests and plant themselves upon our class-abolishing ground they have been and will be received with open arms.

Again, however seemingly friendly to the workers, the middle, including the small farmers', class movements may seem, it were a strategic error of the first water for the proletariat or working class to join them. The reason is that such movements are BOUND to melt away; and the reason of their being so fated to melt away is that the middle class is fated to go; even where numerically it grows, its growth is only in seeming; as a class with class interests it is hopelessly being undersapped by the bigger capitalists; the small man can't compete with the giant concern.

A movement cannot succeed that draws its force from a sinking sap; it can only succeed when the sap is a rising one. While the ranks of the middle class are being steadily depleted, the ranks of the proletariat are steadily swelling. Hence middle-class movements stand on yielding ground and the proletariat stands on firm and ever firmer growing ground and alone can succeed. The right strategy is not to seek for strength from weakness:

*We do not ask the little brook
To turn the wheel;
Unto the larger stream we look.
The strength of steel
We do not ask of silken bands;
Nor hearts of oak from willow wands.
We do not ask the wren to go
Up the heights the eagles know;
Nor yet expect the lark's clear note
From out the dove's dumb throat.*

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

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