

The People.

VOL. VI, NO. 31

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 1896

PRICE 3 CENTS

EDITORIAL

Before the Battle

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At the hustings, the battlefield of civilization, a battle of deep interest will be fought next Tuesday. The forces are marshalled. What does the conflict betoken?

Hitherto, since the Civil War, the political parties of the land were exclusively the political forces of the uppermost capitalist class. They were divided in their own class interests, and each sought to gain the government to promote them. There were two other classes that had already taken shape in the country; the middle class whose machinery of production rendered its existence more and more precarious, being less and less able to compete with the large capitalists, secondly, the growing army of the proletariat, the wage earners, who, owning at all no machinery of production, were compelled to sell themselves into wage slavery. But neither of these two classes had yet waked up to a consciousness of its special economic and political interests; both indulged the illusion that they could yet thrive; and they became camp followers of the large capitalist parties. Thus the issues "Reform and Retrenchment" in '76, and the subsequent ones of "Tariff and Free Trade"—both of them upper capitalist issues, with which neither middle class nor proletariat had any concern, were the sole issues of previous campaigns. The real combatants were the capitalists, with the middle class and proletarians as food for cannon.

Since then both the middle class and a perceptible portion of the proletariat have waked up to their respective class consciousness, the development of capitalism has roused them; the political chess-board has changed accordingly. For the first time in our history we find in the field three contending political forces, each standing upon a political platform that sharply marks the class interests of the three classes into which the country is divided.

The class of large capitalists that grew out of the small bourgeoisie which freed this country from feudalism, is in possession of the nation—economically and politically. It

was born mid the roar of cannon and smell of gunpowder, the child of a revolution. It developed apace, it fulfilled its mission of pointing out the capabilities of co-operative labor, it is now tottering to its fall, and is only an encumbrance in the way of progress. No such social encumbrance ever removed itself; on the contrary, it seeks to perpetuate its existence, and, like a dribbling dotard, seeks to cover itself with the trappings of sanctity. This is the Republican party, whose platform logically proceeds from capitalist principles and seeks to preserve things as they are.

The middle-class is ranked under the Democratic colors. It is not now the same small bourgeoisie out of which grew the large capitalist class. That bourgeoisie, or former middle-class, had its future before it, it was the raw material out of which the capitalist was to be hewn. The present small bourgeoisie or middle class is the ash-barrel refuse of the present industrial system, its future is behind it. Its endeavor is to restore the days of yore, while its predecessor had the mission, which it accomplished, of overthrowing the old and rearing a new system. The modern middle class has preserved of the old middle class its phrases of liberty only, and these sound to-day to knowing ears only as bluster and bravado. Production must be carried on only by large concentrations; the modern middle class or Democratic party is bent upon a counter revolution—the most unmistakable sign of the utter imbecility of a class.

The class conscious Proletariat is the historic successor of the bourgeoisie of 1776. Its mission is to carry on the revolution from the point where capitalism dropped it. Capitalism has revealed the capabilities of co-operative labor, the proletariat is called upon to make these possibilities a reality, by stripping the co-operation-compelling and abundance-producing machinery of production from the fetters that now paralyze it and render it a hindrance to human happiness. The historic mission of the proletariat is to abolish class distinctions by establishing the Co-operative Commonwealth. The political army of the proletariat is marshalled around the banner of the Socialist Labor Party.

Not yet can it be expected to witness the victory of the Proletariat. Old habits of thought will yet keep many in the camp of the Republican or capitalist party; the bluster and the revolutionary phrases uttered in the Democratic or middle class camp will probably entice many thither. In both cases the bulk of these class-conscious proletarians will have been food for the political cannon of their exploiters for the last time. Which of the two camps will keep or draw the larger portion of these this year and thus win the victory a few more days will tell. But that “victory” will be an empty victory. It will crumble in the hands of the “victors.” The only victor next Tuesday will and can be only the Socialist Labor Party, its growth will be marked, and to it are bound to flock in the immediate future the class that belongs there. It’s is the future.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
August 2003