

The People.

VOL. VIII, NO. 42

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, JANUARY 15, 1899

PRICE 2 CENTS

FIRST EDITORIAL

USING THE WORKINGMAN AS A POLITICAL STEP-LADDER.

By DANIEL DE LEON

When, about four years ago, the “Reform” wave beat high in this city, and Labor was called upon by our “best element” to gather under the leadership of these “Gentlemen” for the purpose “of overthrowing the Tammany Hall regime of corruption” a note of double warning was issued from the Socialist camp. The workingmen were warned not to imagine that “washed crime” was any better than “unwashed crime”; their attention was called to it that the “gentlemen” were not after “good government,” that what they were after was to escape being forced to pay blackmail to the “unwashed crime” of Tammany Hall as hush-money for the crimes committed upon Labor by the “washed crime”; and finally they were warned that, to take sides in the issue between the two packs was but to allow the Labor vote to be used as a step-ladder by which the winning set would mount to political preference, and, thereby, to increased power to tyrannize the workers. All the same, “Reform” won. It is unnecessary to recall the facts that went to demonstrate the justice of the Socialist warning. The “Reforming” gentlemen reformed nothing but in their own behalf: the workingman continued trodden-down, and the labor laws were violated as much as before, with the only difference that, formerly, these violations had to be paid for to Tammany by the “gentlemen,” while now the “gentlemen” themselves pocketed the bribe.

Three years of “Reform,” and the “Reformers” were again knocked out, since which time they have set up again their old cry against Tammany. But in doing so now they simply add special confirmation to the justice of the Socialist warning.

A pink of the “Reformers” is Mr. Theodore Roosevelt, elected Governor last year. His first care is to do what? It is to show how criminally the Tammany Hall police neglect to enforce the labor laws in the city of New York! Now, this Roosevelt was, during the “Reform” administration, the head of the New York police. Did he during his term instruct his subalterns on their duties with regard to the labor laws? Not in the

remotest! Did he, when examining them, ascertain their qualifications on that subject? Not at all; on the contrary, what he did examine them on was upon how to break strikes (labor riots, he called it), and how to use an “improved” club on the heads of the working people: from beginning to the end of his administration, the factory and other labor laws of the State remained in this city as dead a letter as they had been and continue to be under Tammany!

The important thing in connection with the picture thus presented is not that the quarrel between the “gentlemen” and Tammany is like a quarrel between the Pot and the Kettle. The point we desire to call attention to is that “the interests of Labor,” in the mouths of their exploiters—whether these be Tammanyites or “Gentlemen—, are simply used as step-ladders to reach political power.

The Tammany exploiters being “out,” they charge the “Gentlemen with “neglecting the interests of Labor”; the “Gentlemen” being “out,” they charge the Tammanyites with “neglecting the interests of Labor”: each, when out of power, is a devoted friend of Labor; in power, is as raw-boned a malefactor and political vampire as the other:

The Devil, being sick, the Devil a monk
would be;

The Devil, being well, the devil a monk
was he.

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

Uploaded February 2004