

Daniel De Leon

Editorial: The Railroad Strike

The great strike on the Lehigh Valley system has passed into its second stage, and the beginning of the end already casts its shadows before.

First, all trades union strikes which fail, start out with enthusiasm, confidence, and certainty of victory, often admixed with bluster, blowing and braggadocio.

Second, comes defection from the ranks of labor, the enrollment of the unorganized and unemployed, the massing of guards and military forces to protect property and scabs, and

Third, outbreaks of doubt and despair on the part of the strikers, exasperation, and illegal recourse to physical force, often mingled with brutality and a total disregard for the rights of innocent persons.

There are other gradations and variations, often, but they are but subdivisions of the main phases outlined above.

What follows the third stage is too well known to require repetition.

In the Lehigh strike the last stage has been reached. Trains have been interfered with, passenger cars stoned, innocent lives endangered, the peace broken, the law and the authorities defied and therefore the natural and logical process follows:

The state's muskets and bayonets and cannon are called out; private and municipal detectives swoop down, arrest, terrorize and often unjustly imprison many innocent with a few hot headed guilty ones; scatterment and disintegration of the most active, daring and influential persons takes place; the strikers

Daniel De Leon

lose heart and courage; the sympathy of stores, shops, hotels and business houses secretly or openly goes towards law, order and the side of the over-mastering corporation, and whether a direct encounter between strikers and the state power takes place or not, capitalism, law entrenched and force-guarded, succeeds, and labor succumbs.

And yet it is seriously contended that the rank and file of the labor organizations who with or without the advice and consent of their leaders will make the splendid personal sacrifices which every one entails, whether successful or not; defiance of municipal or state power, of the laws of ages; of the interest-bound power of concentrated wealth; of the interests of the propertied and middle class small merchant and trader; entail poverty on himself and family; face jails, prisons, the bar of justice and even the gallows, or become homeless wanderers and fugitives—all this they will do and dare for the cause of their class—but they are not “intellectually ripe enough” to take a little piece of white paper with the names of their class-conscious comrades printed therein, and vote the ticket of the Socialist Labor Party for the dethronement of capitalism, the abolition of wage slavery, and the institution of the Co-operative Commonwealth.

We do not believe it.

We are certain the men who will use the crudest and clumsiest weapons of savage warfare, the boomerang, the club, stone, clenched fist and revolver, will also, under proper teaching and intellectual leadership, gladly and most effectually use the most refined, and most powerful weapon of the highest civilization, the workman’s vote, cast opposite to that of the system which breeds strikes, contention, poverty and starvation.

The People, Vol. III, No. 36. Sunday, December 3, 1893

The Railroad Strike

*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