

Daniel De Leon

Editorial: The Noble Art of Making Enemies

“Tell me thy friends and I’ll tell you who you are” is a very common proverb, yet how few who quote it apply it or approve its logical application! To make enemies wisely is the part of statesmanship. As in the case of individuals, so with movements. With the individual, to be all things to all men is to be no better than a rolling stone; with movements, especially great social movements, to be hail-fellow well met with each that {it} comes across is suicidal.

These principles find particular application in these days with regard to two labor organizations—the International Bakers and the Barondess Cloakmakers. Both these organizations fell into the hands of men both ignorant and corrupt, vicious and vain—the former into the hands of one Heinrich Weissmann and the latter into those of one Joseph Barondess, both adventurers of the worst stripe. The effect of these men’s activity was to reduce their organizations to impotence. All the virile elements withdrew, and no new elements were acquired. The British or old style union idea made of the word “union” a holy of holies. As in all such cases, only the depraved profited thereby. To establish a “rival organization” was decried as mortal sin. So long as such superstition prevailed the organization of a craft that had been seized with the dry rot became impossible. In the instance of the two trades mentioned, the result was disastrous while the cause lasted.

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But finally the vigorous spirit of New Trade Unionism asserted itself. It threw off the superstition of old. It refused to kneel down and worship the devil in godly array; it refused to kneel down and worship brigandage that cloaked itself with the sacred mantle of unionism. It set up “rival,” in fact, hostile organizations, and it gathered the workers under its standard of purity to fight and overthrow cliques that stood in the way of progress.

The effect has been marvelous. Having earned the unmitigated enmity of the men whose ignorance and character kept the workers from organizing, the new unions of bakers and cloakmakers gathered strong forces around them, and, what is of equal importance, inspired whatever good elements remained in the old organizations with renewed hope.

The movement, like the man that is afraid to “make enemies,” is a weakling that simply encumbers the earth. Every organization, like every man, who would not lead a purposeless life, must be anxious to “make enemies” of every individual or organized rascal.

In proportion to the vigor of such enmities the contrast is established between the sound and the unsound, thus enabling the masses to distinguish the two and to make their choice.

Evil cannot be met but with the flaming sword of uncompromising hostility. The New Trade Unionist movement in America can wear no nobler badge than the curses of the corruptionists; and as the battle proceeds, the louder the curses the nearer the end of the corruptionists.

Let the fight be carried on all along the line!

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*A De Leon editorial transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the
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