

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 3, NO. 177.

NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1902.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

TURN TO YOUR “EIGHTEENTH BRUMAIRE.”¹

By DANIEL DE LEON

HE who reads the accounts of the ferment in the camp of the retail tobacco dealers cannot, unless mighty well grounded in social science, but feel bewildered. Here are men, none of them looking like idiots, holding most contradictory positions. They want purchasers to boycott the Tobacco Trust, yet admit that if they themselves were to boycott the Trust products from their counters they could not “keep the cash register ringing;” they decide to appeal to the Unions in this “battle against the oppressor,” and yet, their very anxiety, and expressed wish, to “keep the cash register ringing” betrays the fact that they are not standing by the Unions in the Unions’ “battle against the oppressor,”—the boycotted cash register firm; they appeal to the solidarity of the retailers, and yet they turn around and cast suspicion upon their Chicago brother-retailers and fellow-sufferers who are also organizing. And, as if all this were not yet cause enough to bewilder the average observer, the muddle is muddled still worse by the information that comes from the West, to the effect that an enormous cigar factory is to be set up in Chicago by the Trust itself, and that “none but Union men are to be employed.” If ever there was a tangled skein here is one. Not only are the retailers themselves all tangled up, but Labor, “Union Labor,” “Organized Labor”—the supposed co-victim of the octopus—is to become a beneficiary of the dreaded monster, and thereby help divide the otherwise “indivisible people,” whom the retailers claim to represent. For all that, there is no real tangle in the matter; the matter is as clear as a map. When puzzled by the meaning of some English word, the student is told: “Turn to your Anglo-Saxon roots.” So here: “Turn to your *Eighteenth Brumaire*.”

In that masterly analysis of the classes and of their resulting mental conception—the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*—Marx points out that the

¹ [Pi’s corrected from *Weekly People*, Vol. XII, No. 40, Saturday, January 3, 1903.]

Middle Class is a "transition class," and he points out what that means, and what it leads to:

In a transition class, the interests of two hostile classes actually meet. But they meet not to harmonize. As they are only vestiges of the two class-types, they meet only to mutually dull the class instincts of each. The Middle Class being such a transition class, has, accordingly, none but wrath, both for the upper capitalist and for the workingman: it looks upon both as extortionists. An odd mental phantasmagoria is the result. Unactuated by the class instincts of either type-class, the transition Middle Class imagines itself above all class contrasts,—it pronounces itself "the people." What it represents is "the people's rights," its interests are "the people's interests." Hence, at impending struggles, the Middle Class, never considers necessary to examine the interests and attitude of the different classes, its own least of all. But what the Middle Class opines does not change facts. To begin with, it is a "class," consequently, not "the people;" and, to end with, the nature of its own class is to carry in itself the most mutually warring and frayed elements: as it is a sink for the refuse of the Capitalist Class proper, it apes capitalism; as it is the fool's paradise where class-unconscious Labor can revel in its "treasuries" and coffin side-shows, it is the natural asylum, even if not always the birth place, of the genuine Pure and Simple Trades Union, such as the Gompers-Strasser International Cigarmakers' Union. Obviously such a class has in it all the dynamitic powers of disintegration, and none of the powers of mutual attraction. And thus it happens that, in the execution of its grandiloquent projects, the interests of the Middle Class ever turn uninteresting to the masses, and their boasted power proves itself impotence the moment it is put to the test.

There is, assuredly, nothing bewildering in the exhibition of the retail tobacconists. From their internal contradictory attitudes, down to what, superficially looked upon, may seem an external complication with the Cigarmakers' Union, OF WHICH NOT A FEW OF THEM ARE MEMBERS, the matter is plain as plain can be.

The Middle Class man typifies his class in his own person. He is a man at war with himself: one side of him rasps against the other. His emancipation can not start before he has cast-off the physical and mental cocoon wrapper of his class, and developed into the butterfly of the class-conscious working man.

In this development the Middle Class man is aided by two forces, which he equally detests: the Trust, which urges on his physical, the Socialist Labor Party, which molds his mental evolution.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded October 2006