

EDITORIAL

DEATH BENEFITS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

A GOOD deal more than a stray-light into the Civic-Federation-beloved style of Gompers unionism is thrown by the following sentiment, expressed editorially and officially on its Page 17 by the *Pattern Makers' Journal*, for last June:

“The purpose of establishing the death benefit was to secure the prompt payment of dues without which there could be no death benefit, indeed, there could be no organization at all.”

One of two causes fetters the support of Union men to the Union:—

Either its insurance feature;

Or its revolutionary goal.

In the two features lies all the difference between Unionism that IS Unionism, and Unionism that is none.

The historic mission of the Union is to execute the revolutionary act which the political action of Socialism ripens into power. That revolutionary act is the overthrow of capitalist rule. The overthrower ever must be in position to substitute the overthrown. The Union is the embryo of future society. Its subdivisions are the constituents of the Central Administrative Power of the Socialist, or Industrial Republic. Unionism that IS Unionism must, accordingly, be a driller for the Social Revolution; accordingly, the bond to hold the membership is, and can be naught else than class-consciousness—consciousness of class-interests, consciousness of class goal.

On the other hand, where insurance features hold a Union together, the historic mission of the body is hamstrung. Insurance features foment “conservatism.” Where “conservatism” springs up in a body, whose mission is revolution, the petrification of such body is inevitable. Seeing labor has nothing to conserve that is worth the while, “conservatism” spells retrogression for the Union. The body that retro-

gresses and becomes petrified has no means by which to hold together but the means that denies the law of its very being. However blindly a Union may grope itself into existence its instinct is WAR—war against capitalism. War being the very law of the Union's existence, the Union that remains blind perforce becomes a worthless fighter. The goal, however indistinctly perceived, that at first drew dues to the Union, being lost sight of, those dues will no longer be forthcoming. The death of the body becomes imminent. As a consequence the insurance thought arises, and the Union degenerates into an army that has no thought other than for its commissary. As such an army is bound eventually to be smashed, so with the Union that becomes an insurance company. The low level of the goal—not to forfeit the insurance dues that have been paid in—drags down the concern, and it becomes first the pet of Civic Federationism, and then it attracts upon itself the yellow fever microbe of the Militia of Christ.

The evolution into the ground of the class-unconscious Union, though violently denied by its sole beneficiaries, the officers, stands confessed by the official admission on the part of the *Pattern Workers' Journal* that, without its death benefit, the Union could secure no dues, hence its organization would melt away.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded May 2012

slpns@slp.org