

EDITORIAL

## APROPOS OF “DIRECT ACTION.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

**N**O serious person will “chew the rag” over a word, or term. That is the delight of idle minds. Yet minds that do not come under the category of “idle” are often seen tangling themselves in words. Which is the foot that these specimens limp of?

The social season that we are living in, when the Nation is rapidly—and the process is rather to be welcomed—being converted into a broad debating club, renders the contemplation of the phenomenon not interesting merely, but deserving of examination. “Political action,” “Free Trade,” “Direct Action,” “Single Tax,” “Sabotage,” “Protection,” “Anarchy”—these, for instance, are the words over which, as the French put it, the “field is beaten” until the “beaters” know not whether they stand on their heads, or on their feet. That would matter little if the galimatias, or confusion, were limited to the rag-chewers themselves. The trouble is the spectacle tends to confuse the “audience.”

What is the essence of the “clash of words” the din of which is assailing the Nation’s ear?

The clapper-claw over “Direct Action” affords a good portal through which to approach the question.

The Labor Movement started with violence—the unconscious theory that physical force is an all-sufficient and creative power.

Socialism started with Utopia—the belief that good will is all that is needed to redress social ills.

Then came Science. It gathered the facts; weighed and marshaled them in proper focus; raised the theory of the Class Struggle; elucidated the economic foundation therefor; and established the goal identity of the Labor with the Socialist

Movement. The result was the organized Socialist, or Marxian Movement.

The Movement did not, could not, instantly cast off the navel string that connected it with its sources—pure and simple politicianism, i.e., the repudiation of all thought of physical force; and pure and simple physical force, i.e., the repudiation of all thought of political action.

Obviously, the two extreme tendencies contain, and {can} not choose but contain, in common the theory of physical force. Obviously, also, the common theory was thrown out of focus in both—the one extreme utterly rejecting, the other extreme planting itself exclusively upon the theory, and scornfully rejecting all other. As the Socialist Labor Party officially put the matter at the Stuttgart Int'l Socialist Congress (1907), without political action, Socialism could never gather the physical forces (the industrially and integrally organized proletariat) for ultimate triumph; without the said physical forces, the day of the political triumph of Socialism would be the day of its defeat.

To a great extent, the energies of the Socialist Movement are inevitably expended in disentangling and ridding itself of the clogs of its natal soilure—pure and simple politicianism, on the one flank, pure and simple physical force on the other.

The historical setting of a term is essential to its understanding. The above condensed sketch of the evolution of Socialism reveals the historic setting of "Direct Action"—a more modern term for pure and simple physical force, expressly repudiatory of all thought of political action, and embodying contempt for the same as wasteful of time and efforts, besides being peculiarly exposed to corruption, hence, all the more wastefully indirect.

That "Direct Actionists" there are who say they do not object to political action does not alter the facts. If these straddlers are sincere, then they are not "Direct Actionists," but use the appellation giddy-headedly. There may be such people. Historically, the type is well known of "Direct Actionists," who "do not object to political action." It is a type which the caught Anarchist is frequently found to illustrate. When Anarchists are on trial they frequently hide behind the skirts of Socialism. Ettore did so at Salem. When his lawyer, himself an Ettoreite, endeavoring to prove Ettore a peacefulite, submitted as documentary testimony the Manifesto which called forth the I.W.W., he read from the document especially the clause which indi-

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cated the necessity of political action, an idea which the Ettore I.W.W., pictorially designated as the "Bummery," had ostentatiously expunged from their "I.W.W." preamble. The same shuffling is met when the Anarchist, or the "Direct Actionist," is "caught" in a debate. He plays scuttle-fish. The scuttle-fish does not cease to be a scuttle-fish because of the animal's dyeing the water around him inky. The scuttle-fish does not, thereby, become inky water; nor, vice versa, does the inky water, thereby, become scuttle-fish.

What has here been said about "Direct Action" and "Anarchy," generally, flashlights the clapper-claw that is going on over so many other "theories"—pure and simple political action, "Free Trade," "Single Tax," "Sabotage," "Protection," etc.

All these one-ideas, virtual monomanias, contain a fraction of truth, or fact. In all, the truth, or fact, is thrown out of focus, and, thereby, becomes Nonsense. Now, then, it is the feature of Nonsense that it "dares not stand alone"; it can not stand alone. Hence, we see pure and simple political actionists periodically throw out their chest, mock-heroically, and "talk big," real "blood and thunder"; hence, the experience of "patriotic" Protectionists indulging in smuggling wherever, and to the extent that they may have a chance; hence, the sight of "Single Taxers"—the upholders of a theory to the effect that the cause of involuntary poverty is the private ownership of land, and that by removing all taxes, except one on land values, involuntary poverty will cease to be—hence, the sight of these theorickers propping up their Nonsense with Socialistic props; hence, the common spectacle of "Sabotage," a branchlet of "Direct Action," seeking to identify its individual crimes with the legitimate measures of mass warfare; hence, the droll performances of "broad-minded" Free Traders in Congress, ever hedging to "protect" their own "home industries," from pineapples in Florida to tin in Missouri;—in each instance, playing scuttle-fish with their exact opposites, exactly as our lady and gentleman "Direct Actionists" do with political action.

The manifestation is the homage that Nonsense renders to Sense; the confession of its own untenableness. So far as that goes, the manifestation is a rose. But the rose has ugly thorns—it incites the "clapper-claw" and "chewing of the rag," the talking at random, shallowly, round about a subject, with, frequently, the fan of vanity fanning the flames of angry resistance to what slovenly minds designate as

the “straight jacket” of logic, which demands careful ascertaining of facts, and the cogent reasoning from them.

Seeing that the gratifying manifestation of the homage that Nonsense renders to Sense has the evil effect of inciting the clapper-claw and the rag-chewing, it behooves the militant Socialist to cause the thorn of the rag chewing and clapper-claw, in turn, to yield its rose—the spur to the militant Socialist to set the pace of reasoning from below up; never a moment to yield to the butterfly lure of fluttering all over the face of the earth; to insist unflinchingly upon the observance of all that is meant by the “historic method of reasoning” and of all that is implied in logic;—to insist upon all this, despite all insult; indeed, to crave the insult as a further homage due to Sense from Nonsense.

It is a duty of the hour, apropos of “Direct Action.”

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