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# As to Unity with the SLP:

Letter to the Editor of *The Worker*,

July 21, 1906.

by Ben Hanford

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To the Editor of *The Worker*:—

“How many angels can dance on the point of a needle?” That is the question, and you must know the answer. If you do not know the answer, you are not “sound.” If you know and will not tell, you are “neutral,” or you are not “clear-cut” and “class-conscious.”

Not only must you know how many angels can dance on the point of a needle, but you must know many other things, some of them much more difficult of comprehension and demonstration than that, and even then you are not to be looked upon as really “genuine” unless you know and can prove — documents on file in the office of the Only Party-Owned Press — a lot of things which are not so.

But let the angels dance, while I briefly review a few FACTS. In the Proceedings of the New Jersey Unity Conference, under the heading of “Discipline,” I find the following:

In a political party of Socialism the word discipline has its two-fold application. First, the discipline of obedience to FACTS, and the obedience to rules and regulations that the FACTS prescribe for the realization of the Socialist aim. \*\*\*

Those who have watched the course of the Socialist Labor Party for the 7 years past will certainly be surprised to find any allusion to FACTS in a docu-

ment proceeding from that source. But the New Jersey Unity Conference will not have been held in vain if it shall cause the comrades of the Socialist Party to recall a few of the FACTS in the history of the Socialist Labor Party.

The first FACT to be noted is that for 7 years the SLP has at all times, so far as it had power of expression by print or speech, denounced, anathematized, and vilified the trade union movement of the United States.

The second FACT to be noted is that for 7 years the Socialist Labor Party has devoted the greater part of its energy to the disruption and destruction of the bona fide political and economic labor movement in the United States.

Who of the active comrades of the Socialist

Party can fail to recall the innumerable efforts of the DeLeonites to break up our propaganda meetings?

In several campaigns most of the SLP literature and in some campaigns almost their only literature was the lying circular, “What’s the Difference?” and year after year the members of the Socialist Party have had to devote almost as much of their effort and their slender means to meeting the attacks of the SLP as we did to the battle with the capitalist class.

FACTS? In 1900 the SLP in its National Con-



vention declared by resolution that “capitalism, with its consequent wage system, rests upon institutions essentially political.” But today its infallible pope takes a different position.

FACTS? In 1900 the SLP National Convention denounced the pure and simple trade union as it still does, and declared that “this bogus trade unionism lies impotent, petrified, motionless, holding the proletariat at the mercy of the capitalist class,” and concluding its resolutions with a paragraph containing this advice: “Let the Socialist watchwords everywhere be: ‘Down with trade unionism pure and simple!’ ‘Away with the labor fakirs!’ ‘Onward with the Socialist Trade & Labor Alliance and the Socialist Labor Party!’”

FACTS? Well, the great fact of all that should not be for a moment lost sight of is that the SLP followed up its fight on the trade unions for the 4 years following their 1900 convention — with what result? With the result that the SLP constantly decreased in votes, and that both the SLP and the ST&LA decreased in membership and became a stench in the nostrils of the working class.

FACTS? What was left of the SLP held another National Convention in 1904. Had they learned from their 4 years of experience the villainy and folly of striving to destroy the Socialist Party and the organized labor movement? Not at all, as we shall see. The only members of the SLP who have learned anything in the last 7 years have either been expelled from the party or have voluntarily left it.

FACTS? The SLP National Convention of 1904 unanimously adopted the following resolution:

Resolved, That the Socialist Labor Party recognizes as pure and simple trade unions all economic organizations not endorsed by the SLP or affiliated with it, and furthermore declares that at the present time the Socialist Trade & Labor Alliance is the only organization that is so endorsed.

FACTS? In that same National Convention of 1904 the SLP adopted another resolution in which they declared that the Western Federation of Miners, then in the midst of a battle for the very life of the organization, and while its members were suffering all the horrors of deportation and the bullpen — under such conditions and at such a time the SLP in National Convention assembled solemnly declared by resolution that the Western Federation of Miners were guilty of “an act of treachery to the working class.”

This, too, while President Moyer had been out of a military prison less than a month.

FACTS? At that same convention of 1904 the SLP adopted another resolution in which it was declared that the American Labor Union was a “caricature of the Socialist Trade & Labor Alliance,” “the conduct of which (the ALU) has resulted in the present Colorado outrages upon the working class.”

The FACTS quoted above are taken exclusively from *The People* of various dates. But one other FACT should be noted. It is that this course of the SLP under the guidance of the character-assassin who “edits” its Party-Owned Press, has failed in two ways. It has not succeeded in destroying the economic labor movement, either Socialist or non-Socialist, and (save for the bad odor) it has destroyed the Socialist Labor Party. From the time that DeLeon began his tactics of destroying the trade unions down to the present hour the SLP has decreased in votes, in membership, and in influence.

What, on the other hand, has been the result of the different course pursued by the Socialist Party? Its vote, its membership, and its influence on the labor movement has constantly increased. With a knowledge of what is required to make and be a militant Socialist, I ask the comrades to consider how it would have been possible for the Socialist Party to have more real and true progress more rapidly than it has done.

Aside from personal frailty or folly, there is a broad and clear line distinguishing the tactics of the SLP and the Socialist Party. Briefly stated, the Socialist Party allows its individual members and its constituent organizations to work for Socialism in their own way, only resorting to disciplinary measures when they pursue a way or resort to means that stultifies the end. On the other hand, the editor of the Party-Owned Press, by printing what he desires them to know and omitting those things of which he wants them to remain ignorant, decides what is the best way to work for Socialism in the Socialist Labor Party and then uses the party machinery to make others work HIS way. But it will not work. In a voluntary organization, such as the political organizations of the working class are and must be, men will not work unless they are allowed to work their own way. If any party members knows of a better way to work, he must SHOW his comrades that his way is better. They will not adopt it

because of a party resolution or disciplinary action. Even a capitalist employer who is wise in his generation recognizes that if a man is not allowed to work in his own way he will not work his best. You cannot hire and keep the services of a poor old scrub-woman unless you let her scrub in her own way.

Shall the Socialist Party discontinue the policy under which it has achieved such splendid success, and adopt the policy of the SLP, which has accomplished nothing but its own ruin?

I want to see every bona fide Socialist in the Socialist Party. To such the doors of the party have ever been and will continue to remain open. But unity with the SLP would not mean unity if the Manifesto of the New Jersey Conference is to be taken as a guide. If we were to unite on the basis of the Manifesto we would only unite to fight and divide. Let those who believe in the SLP tactics go with that party. If they cannot learn by example, let them learn by experience. As they seek to impose their ideas on others today, so if they join the SLP others tomorrow will in turn seek to co-

erce them — with the result that sooner or later they will be thrown out or throw others out. Today they have settled just what is right and just what is wrong in relation to the IWW and the AF of L and the Party-Owned Press, but people who pursue a course of dogmatism and intolerance toward others will find that, no matter how apparently harmonious they may be today, tomorrow will bring its dogmas, its battle, and its schism.

How many angels can dance on the point of a needle? If you cannot answer, you should not join the SLP. Sooner or later that question, or others much more difficult, will be up for discussion in the SLP, it will be decided by the editor of the Party-Owned Press, and if you do not happen to be “right” on it, you will be expelled.

*Ben Hanford.*

781 Marcy Avenue, Brooklyn.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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