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EDITORIAL

THE GREAT I.W.W. CONVENTION.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE convention of the Industrial Workers of the World, that met in Chicago on September 17th under brooding clouds of apprehension, with Charles O. Sherman in the chair, and adjourned on the 4th of this month, with the clouds lifted, with rousing cheers for the Social Revolution, and with Vincent St. John in the chair, marks an epoch in the history of the American Labor Movement. It marked a new era. Reserving for future treatment, under the title "Flash-Lights from the Chicago Convention," the numerous salient points of that memorable gathering, a few rough sketches may be appropriately given in advance.

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More than once before now have labor conventions been convulsed by contending factions. Hitherto, however, the two factions were equally corrupt, because equally reactionary. The issue then always was between the Outs and the Ins. It was a struggle for graft. On all such occasions the progressive, or revolutionary, element played a sad role. Ever in a hopeless minority, it had no choice but pin its hope upon hope; side with the Outs; and trust—how vainly!—that the crooked stick, used in battering down the crooked Ins, might somehow be straightened out in the process. It was otherwise at Chicago. For the first time in the history of the Labor Movement, a mass of pure delegates—sound, because revolutionary; revolutionary because sound;—found itself welded in a solid, impregnable battalion; found itself an absolute majority; delivered battle to Reaction; and triumphed.

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Last year's, the first annual convention of the I.W.W., was a spontaneous breath of the Revolutionary Proletariat. As always in such instances, the move was

trustful, confiding, unsuspecting. The capitalist foe, together with all the elements that are more or less sincerely revolutionary, but whose thoughts are dominated by bourgeois habits of thought, was quickly alive to the danger then born, and immediately set to work to scuttle it. The unsuspecting, the confiding nature of the infant Movement was exploited for fully a year by the foe. The foe worked hard, laid its pipes, set its wires. At this convention the revolutionary breath of last year was to be stifled.

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Two elements, seemingly distinct, but one at bottom, joined hands in the attempt to perpetrate the nefarious deed. The first of the two elements was the labor lieutenants of the Belmont Civic Federation; that element was represented by John Mitchell, and he operated through one Smith, the manager of the Joliet Republican Printing Company in which Charles O. Sherman is financially interested. The second element consisted of the pure and simple political Socialists of the Socialist party.

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The Bible story is told of the Archfiend's taking Jesus to the top of a mountain, showing him the Kingdoms of the earth, and telling him all that would be his property if he would only bow down and worship him. The two elements above named operated upon the weakest man I have ever come across—Charles O. Sherman. Myriads of workingmen were promised to him for his organization if he would but bow down to the Tempter, do his bidding, and fire out the "revolutionists." To the eternal glory of the S.L.P. in general, of myself in particular, the Tempter defined the "revolutionists" as "Daniel De Leon and his S.L.P. bunch." Jesus turned upon the Tempter with the words: "Get thee behind me, Satan!" The weak-as-mush Sherman succumbed.—Right here I must say that, when I left New York for the convention, I left with confidence in Sherman, and with the belief that I would make his renomination speech. It was a personal sorrow to me to discover what I did discover at Chicago. A reverencer of FACTS, I had no choice but bow down to the damnable FACTS that crowded upon me, although it grieved me to the heart.

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In point of number of delegates and in point of votes that they polled “the S.L.P. bunch” was a negligible quantity in the convention. St. John, one of the four miners’ delegates and an S.P. man; Albert Ryan, another of the four miners’ delegates and no-party man; Heslewood, an alternate for the said four miners’ delegates and an S.P. man, who promptly substituted one of the other two miners’ delegates when that reactionist bolted the convention; Maichele and Jackson of the Metal Workers, the former a no-party man, the latter of the S.P.—these five men polled more than two-thirds of the revolutionary vote. The Tempter had deceived Sherman. At the convention he found himself confronted with a revolutionary force, in which, true to the theory of the I.W.W., political parties were blended into one body by being solidly planted upon the rock-bed of true, sound, bona-fide, in short, revolutionary economic or industrial organization.

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The reactionary conspiracy dashed itself against that revolutionary rock. As the timbers of the reactionary craft were dashed, its secrets leaked out. The conspirators in office were given full time. For fully two weeks they were put to their trial. They—Sherman, Mahoney, McCabe, Kirkpatrick and Cronin—came out convicted documentarily and from their own mouths. Graft, that cried to heaven, and made ducks and drakes of the workers’ money; corruption stenchful; autocracy, that trampled upon the constitution and treated the rank-and-file as so much cattle;—all that was uncovered. Mahoney, as the representative, under the constitution, of the Mining Department, could not yet be disposed of. Sherman, however, together with his at once masters and pets, McCabe and Kirkpatrick, were deposed, while Cronin was got rid of by the election of a new set of stalwart members-at-large of the General Executive Board.

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So soon as the buzz-saw of the Revolution began grinding, the conspirators and their heelers in and out of the convention showed signs of the insanity that frequently seizes uncovered malefactors. They tried to drug members of the revolutionary element with drugged liquor; they displayed large rolls of money accidentally on purpose to tempt them with corruption; they went about promising

or offering members of the revolutionary element good jobs and other things vaguely referred to as “a good thing.” Sherman tried to tempt me with the suggestion of my becoming the Editor of *The Industrial Worker*;—and so forth, until now they finally have reached the climax of dementia. They, a deposed bunch, have, Kangaroo-like, set themselves up as a Kangaroo court, and gone through the farce of “deposing” the regularly elected officers; justly afraid of the retribution that the referendum of the I.W.W. has in store for them, and knowing that only a fraction of the organization is ignorant or tainted enough to rally to their colors, have adopted the course of seeking to disrupt the I.W.W. and “vindicate” themselves with such packed vote as they would count; they have gone further, and, by seeking to slug St. John, whom the Mine Owners’ Association has but recently sought to assassinate, have given to the world the distressing spectacle of I.W.W. men lining up with the would-be murderers of Haywood, Moyer and Pettibone!

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The Second Annual Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World marks an epoch. If the two-year-old infant has proved to be possessed of sufficient vitality to cleanse itself from within, what but DEATH must not the adult I.W.W. spell to the capitalist system of inhumanity. With graft exposed and thrown overboard, with the corrupt hindrances of Belmontism to the organization of the coal miners and other leading industries broken through, the I.W.W. emerges from its second annual convention steeled for its task to unify the Working Class of America upon the political as well as upon the industrial field, to the end that they may take and hold their own—to the end that, in the prophetic words of Marx, they may ring to the world the signal for the emancipation of the Wage Slave, as the bourgeois of America rang to the world in 1776 the signal for the downfall of feudalism.

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