

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 10, NO. 23.

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, JULY 23, 1909.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

A MISSION OF POLITICAL GOVERNMENT.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE general mission of political government, to keep down the exploited class, has been often referred to in these columns, and illustrated with the events of the day. The joint resolution of the Senate and House of Representatives, looking to an amendment of the Constitution in the matter of taxation, furnishes a prime illustration of that specific mission of political government which consists in acting as a breakwater and barrier against legislation that is distasteful, inconvenient, or hurtful to the ruling class.

The joint resolution calls upon the Legislatures of the forty-six States of the Union to vote upon the proposition, amending the Constitution, whereby Congress shall have power to lay and collect direct taxes on incomes without apportionment among the several States according to population. Obedient to the Constitution the amendment is adopted if three-fourths of the States ratify the same.

The purpose of the amendment is to reach the multimillionaires—those stupendous sponges, who have sponged unto themselves, if not the bulk, at any rate a large portion of the wealth of the land, without contributing their proportional share in the expenses needed to uphold the Government under which the sponging was done, and from which the sponging expects protection. As an economic measure, the move is clumsy, besides ineffectual and inefficient. Clumsy is all scheme that contemplates the curbing of an evil while protecting the evil itself: ineffectual and inefficient are all such schemes because the evil that is powerful enough to prevent being uprooted will be found also powerful enough to avoid the consequences of the scheme. All this nevertheless, the action of Congress is the result of a popular pressure that can no longer be resisted. Unable as yet to discover the exact spot where the shoe pinches, the masses of the people are blindly striking out. Populism, the first widespread manifestation of the blind groping in the dark,

formulated a similar demand. The sentiment survived Populism. It even grew in force. The result is the Constitutional amendment now proposed by a Republican Congress itself.

Unable to wholly resist the disagreeable demand, the top ruling class yields—but how? The political government which it has set up now comes into play as a breakwater.

It takes three-fourths of the States to ratify the amendment. If but twelve of the forty-six decline the amendment is lost and the rising flood is thus forced to roll back. Nor does the presentation furnish the full picture of the structure of the breakwater. Before the proposition is accepted by any State, it must be accepted by both branches of the State's Legislature—a breakwater within a breakwater, or a second string to the bow with which political government performs its legal “hold-up.”

Official and professional defenders of capitalist government have exhausted their ingenuity to make this labyrinthian system appear as a blessing, a guarantee against “hasty legislation.” It no doubt is a blessing—to the beneficiaries of the breakwater system; unquestionably, any and all legislation that interferes with the aforesaid beneficiaries is “hasty”—such legislation can not come too slowly to suit them.

Fact is that under a social system where arduous and life-consuming toil is not the lot of the masses, and where abundance can be produced with merely healthy exercise, there can never be any danger of unthinking, hence, hasty legislation. The leisure enjoyed by all would be a guarantee of mental uplift and experience. Legislation under such circumstances does not need to be strained through a process whose only purpose is delay. Legislation would then respond promptly to the people's will, whereas to-day, with political government, legislatures are but breakwaters to render impossible, at any rate to delay as much as possible legislation that is in the slightest way “undesirable.”

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded September 2010

slpns@slp.org