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EDITORIAL

## “EXPERIMENTS.”

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**J**. A. EDGERTON, the National Secretary of the People’s party, has issued a call for an “unofficial and informal conference of Reformers” to meet in Denver on July 27 and “provide a political home for the large army of voters who are not Republicans, Cleveland Democrats or Karl Marx Socialists.” People who are posted pronounced the effusion “the death-rattle of the Populist party.” The opinion is borne out by the whole tenor of the call. In this sense, even if in no other, the call is a historic document. It is historic, however, or we may rather say classic in another sense also. It is a documentary proof, testimony and monumental demonstration of the correctness of the Socialist Labor Party attitude, when it refused to be lured into Populism as “American Socialism,” pronounced the thing from top to bottom an ash-barrel of back-number bourgeois radicalism, false in premises, false in reasoning and incoherent—and was roundly denounced with all manner of epithets for so holding. It will be unnecessary to take up National Secretary Edgerton’s “arguments” in detail. One will serve as a good example of the lot. He—this National Secretary of what was called “the Socialism of America”—says on the subject of Socialism:

“All that the most ardent supporter of Socialism can claim for it is that, as advocated, it is a theory, an experiment. However well it looks on paper, it still is untried. Does any rational man imagine that the great conservative American people will turn over all existing institutions to substitute therefor an experiment? Does history teach such a thing? Or common sense?”

If this means anything it means the setting up of a new “philosophy of history”—one whose distinctive characteristic is that it has not a single historical leg on which to stand, and that its conception of humanity on the stage of history is

that of inventors of patent machines in a workshop.

Let’s trace history back—

What about the theory of “the free and unlimited coinage of silver at the ratio of 16 to 1, without international agreement”?—mark you, not the coinage of silver merely; not even with the 16 to 1 addition; but with the full program as stated above—had it ever been tried before? And yet Populism had no names too severe to apply to those who did not “see things in those lamps.” But lest National Secretary Edgerton may claim for his conception of historic evolution that the miserable fate of Populism proves his theory in that “the rational and great conservative American people refused to try the experiment,”—lest he take that dodge, let’s cite a few of the “experiments” that WERE tried by great nations, the “great conservative American people” included.

And to begin with this very people. We refer Mr. Edgerton to a certain publication called *The Federalist*. It was a magazine, issued shortly after the Revolution. None but acknowledged leaders in the country’s birth contributed to it. The issue was to abolish the “Confederacy,” a system of government that had often before been tried in human experience, and set up a new system—the present system—NEVER TRIED BEFORE, and assailed for that very reason. Well, we did try the experiment—and liked it.

And before that was our Revolution. The sight of colonists tearing themselves loose by force of arms from the mother country and setting up an independent country had never been tried before.—We did, and succeeded.

The sight of capitalist interests rising against and hamstringing feudalism, and setting up a government on the new plan had never been seen before in England or elsewhere; the experiment was untried.—They tried it, and liked it.

Back of that, feudalism was an untried experiment when it was introduced. It came in, and did its work.

For further luminous instances Mr. Edgerton is referred to the work of one of the most illustrious sons of our “great conservative American people”—Lewis H. Morgan—who in his *Ancient Society* gives the instances in succession of the great periods of human life, at each of which institutions previously unknown and untried came in.

From all these instances the principle of human guidance has been—not that of staying in a burning house until the experiment was made of how to live without that structure, but to get out betimes, and try the experiment of living according to the changed conditions. In each of these instances of successively recurring burning structures, some people lost their heads, leaped out of the windows and dashed out their brains—as Populism has done in our own times; others, too slow to perceive, and too anxious to save their trinkets and fetishes, stayed in too long and were buried under the burning ruins, before they could get out—as the Tories in the American Revolution, the Southern Bourbons in the Civil War, etc., etc. But others, the third and sensible set, “caught on,” got out and started the “experiment”—as the Revolutionary Fathers, and as the Socialists of to-day.

And what was it that these men regularly caught on? It was the principle of Social Evolution, which, at stated periods in the history of the human race, says to man in thunder tones:

“Live—and ‘substitute an experiment’ by getting out of the burning social structure; or stay in, be ‘greatly conservative,’—and die”

Humanity has on the whole preferred to live—hence the “untried experiment” of Socialism is assured.

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