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SECOND EDITORIAL

My Ladies Singer

By DANIEL DE LEON

The cable dispatch announcing last week the death of the Duchess Decazes brings to mind one of the completest illustrations of the fact that capitalism has returned America into a plantation, and our working people into plantation niggers.

The plantation of slavery days furnished a living to the master. This living was produced by the negro slaves; they were compelled to work under the lash; if they sought to escape, they were captured and fetched back. The sweat of their brows, the marrow of their bones, transformed into bales of cotton or bags of rice, was shipped abroad; it was there converted into shining gold; and the gold enabled many an idle slave-holder to live in princely style beyond the Atlantic, under the shadow of royalty, along the perfumed banks of the Rhine or the Seine—at a goodly distance from the odor of and vulgar contact with his drudges in republican America. With the “emancipation” of the negro, labor was proclaimed “free,” and thereby another illusion was added to our crop of national illusions. The career of the family of the late Isaac Singer, of Singer Manufacturing Company fame, throws this illusion into strong light.

Isaac Singer had availed himself of all the opportunities offered by capitalism to sponge up wealth. Hard-hearted, greedy and close-fisted, he had worked Labor for all it was worth, and when he died he was worth \$7,000,000, that is to say, he owned a seven-million-dollar power to plunder the working class with. As it always happens with these “founders of capitalist families,” Isaac was icy as an iceberg, he was stingy, mean and crusty. At his death he left 3 relicts—a widow and two daughters. His death was the signal for them to enjoy life. They went through the forms of mourning, no doubt. Who knows but that our genial poet John Godfrey Saxe took them as his models then he wrote that satirical poem, “The Mourner a la Mode.” After the mourning was over, these three females took wing and let themselves down in Europe, and there, in rapid succession, married 3 “noblemen.” The old lady set the example by taking the Papal Duke of Caposelice for her consort; her daughter Winnaretta followed

suit by marrying Prince Louis de Scey-Montbellard, and the next year Isabella, the second daughter, now deceased, coupled with the Duke Jean Elie Decazes—and the 3, together with their male adjuncts and the spawn of their “affections,” have been living gorgeously in Europe ever since.

As already pointed out, it was not actual wealth that old Singer left to the amount of \$7,000,000, but that amount of labor-fleecing power. The two Singer Duchesses and the Princess could not have afforded 3 banquets upon the actual, consumable wealth left by old Singer. The numerous banquets they have given, the royal raiments they have decked themselves with, the pretentious residences they have inhabited represent the wealth that their inheritance (capital) enabled them to suck out of American workers.

But is not America independent from Europe? Have we not abolished all titles of nobility? Does the American worker not dislike the idea of Princes and Dukes, and baby Princes and baby Dukes? And, above all, is not the American worker, different from the chattel slave, free to change his employer, to choose his employer? Certainly! Yet all this becomes illusory under the capitalist system.

The “free” laborer is not taken bodily and bodily forced to work for a capitalist, but hunger accomplishes the same thing that physical force did before. Deprived of all natural and social opportunities to earn a living for and by himself, the worker takes what job he can; he virtually becomes a slave bound to the soil; escape is impossible to him. Brutalized by his conditions he becomes repulsive to his exploiters, and these, the same as the slave-holders of old, seek foreign shores for their homes, where they draw in idle luxury, bedecked with feudal titles, a sustenance from a soil said to be “independent,” through the enforced labor of a population said to be “free.”

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

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