

EDITORIAL

THE COMEDY OF CHATTANOOGA.

By DANIEL DE LEON

ON the 8th instant, at Chattanooga, Tennessee, the convention of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen being in session, President Theodore Roosevelt was made an honorary member, and addressed his new-found fellow-craftsmen as “brothers,” whereupon there was great applause.

Is this merely a comedy? Would it were!

If one looks over the whole gamut of workingmen, the Chinese contingent is easily picked out as that standing at the lowest step of the ladder. Tradition, hoary-headed and encrusted deep with habits of thought, weighs upon them. And gradual have the steps been through which, since the dim past, this result has been attained. One of the means by which the Chinese masses have come to be the abject thing they now are has been the insidious system of degrading while seeming to exalt them. An instance is the comedy annually performed since time immemorial at the opening of the season. The emperor, decked in imperial robes, steps upon the ground, takes hold of a plow and cuts a furrow a few inches long. The act is meant to “dignify” agriculture and to denote the value set upon the workers in the field. The trick takes. The horny-handed and bent-backed toilers imagine the emperor is one of them, or they one of him; they forget their hard lot; they overlook the fact that his fatness is an inventory to particularize their leanness; they feel not, through the wind thus blown into them, the heavy burden of supporting him and the class he represents;—in short, they applaud, are happy and sink proportionally in manhood.

Such has been the annual comedy to degrade the Chinaman in China. If it had there that effect—there where the emperor actually stepped upon the sod, actually took hold of an actual plow, and actually did cut a furrow, {—} how far Chinese ward must not the American workingman be sinking when he can be intoxicated by a Roosevelt becoming

merely an “honorary member” of the deadly trade of locomotive firemen, and without his even stepping into a locomotive cabin, let alone taking hold of a shovel and shoveling coal, they can feel inflated, forget the thousands of homes of their fellow craftsmen, rendered desolate by the accidents that befall the breadwinner, thanks to the very social system that Roosevelt upholds, and imagine him one of them, and them one of him?

Sudden descents shock, and call attention to the fall through the shock. Gradual descent, oiled by the comedy of equality between the fleecers and the fleeced, are insensible. They lead to the ditch by easy gradations.

The comedy at Chattanooga marks one of these gradations—beyond which looms the coolie.

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