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EDITORIAL

THE MORAL LAW.

By DANIEL DE LEON

“The civil law does not pretend to take into account everything that is good and bad. The civil law does not treat of all the rights and duties and the obligations of men. If it does we had better nail up our church doors, and close our schoolhouses forever, and burn most of the books which have dealt with the questions of moral conduct. If a civil strife like this comes on, then those responsible for it must consider the moral law. . . . Mr. Mitchell recognized this law.”—Counselor Darrow before the Arbitration Commission, Philadelphia, Feb. 13, 1903.

THE conduct of the human race—taken as a whole—is dictated, not by what it WISHES, but by what it MUST. This great law of social evolution, if ignored, leads to visionariness, and, via visionariness, to disaster; if recognized, it leads to intelligent, and, via intelligent action, to progress. By the light of that law, that which otherwise would seem a perplexing fact, ceases to be such; nay, it becomes luminous, so luminous as to be a torch to guide man’s steps in the accomplishment of his mission on earth. The “civil law” is the work of man; “churches, schoolhouses and books” on moral conduct are likewise the work of man. Man, being the framer of both, for what reason does he fail to square the former to the principles of moral conduct that he himself lays down in the latter? For what reason is the civil law left so full of cracks? Is it done on purpose? No; man has no choice. He acts as he MUST, not as he WISHES. The moral aspirations of the race are perfect; its material powers are imperfect. What he does, accordingly, is a compromise between that which he wishes, and that which he can. This mighty Truth once grasped points to two important conclusions:

First—The course of moral conduct on earth is to improve, and ever strain to improve, the material powers at man’s disposal so as to fashion them into as fit instruments as may be for the satisfaction of his perfect moral aspirations;

Second—(and this is an inevitable conclusion of the first) That individual

conduct is IMMORAL that, while straining to keep the material instruments down in a state of imperfection, clamors for perfect moral aspirations. Shipwrecked men, tossed on a raft in midocean, will become cannibals. Double-dyed is the immorality that would uphold the “shipwreck status” and yet clamor for benignity.

The civil law, in force at any time, is but a reflex of man’s ascertained material powers to reach his moral aspiration,—of his ascertained powers at the time of the framing of such law. The existing civil law is a reflex of material powers that dictated CAPITALISM. Capitalism places in private hands—the hands of the Capitalist Class—the tools needed to supply the needs of man. The social conditions that flow from these premises sentence an ever larger portion of the population, the Working Class, to the level of merchandise; and this, in turn, amounts to a sentence of ever deepening dependence and misery upon the workingman. Are, to-day, the material powers at man’s disposal the weak powers that once forced him to adopt Capitalism? They are not. Indeed, in the fiery furnace of capitalism did he forge the superior instruments wherewith to enable him to reach nearer to his moral aspirations. The phenomenal volume of wealth now producible now makes possible the freeing of man from the brute state of arduous toil for the necessaries of life. Accordingly, the material capability of man has come up to his moral aspirations. What he now wishes, he also can. No compromise is now needed.

At such stages in the history of the race, human forces divide. One set, holds to what is; the other set pushes on to what is not yet. The Capitalist Class, true to its class interests{,} is conservative. The class conscious Working Class pushes toward a more modern “system of civil law,”—towards Socialism. In this conflict of irreconcilable interests, in this “Irrepressible Conflict” of our generation, where stands John Mitchell?

Does he stand with both feet by President Baer? If he did, then sentence might be passed upon him for simple immorality. No, he stands with one foot by President Baer and the other against. In one breath he upholds the “shipwreck status,” in the other he clamors for benignity.

Whatever may be the case with President Baer, one thing is obvious, the immorality of John Mitchell is double-dyed.

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