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EDITORIAL

## “ON THE ROARING BILLOWS,” OR “TALKING IT OVER.”

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**S**EVERAL months ago, an out-bound steamer from New York had among its passengers two gentlemen—Lawrence Murphy and John Black. They were friends going to the same destination. They were always together, and always in close conversation. It so happened that on the same steamer there was a Marconi wireless telegraphic apparatus. It was being shipped to England. It also so happened that Murphy and Black, by mere accident and unknowingly, chose for their conversation a secluded spot that was quite close to the said wireless telegraphic apparatus, which, to complete the series of accidental circumstances, happened to be boxed in such poor material that there was a wide rent in the wood on the side facing the spot where Murphy and Black habitually exchanged thoughts. When the apparatus was opened in England, the sensitive plates were found scribbled all over with sound waves. These were easily deciphered, but they conveyed no intelligent information; they were bits and scraps of conversations, interesting enough, even mysterious, but unintelligible. These bits and scraps might have proceeded from the same persons, and they might not; if from the same persons, they might have been fragments of one continuous dialogue, the continuity of which on the plate might have been interrupted by slight atmospheric changes during the conversation, or by the speakers happening to turn their faces from the direction of the plates during their dialogue. All the same, the mysterious bits and scraps were preserved as a purely “scientific experiment,” and nothing more was thought of them by the one-sidedly informed wireless scientists, who did not perceive that those bits and scraps of conversation, fractional though they were, threw valuable light on the “Labor Movement,” on sociology.

The mystery is now raised. One Lawrence Murphy, ex-treasurer of the

Journeyman Stonecutters’ Union, is now on trial on the charge of grand larceny in the Court of General Sessions. The charge is that he stole \$12,000 from the treasury of his union. The facts, figures, etc., that are coming out fit in exactly with the bits and scraps of conversations preserved by the wireless telegraphic plates on the out-bound steamer that several months ago carried passengers Lawrence Murphy and John Black to Europe. Passenger Murphy is the same Murphy now on trial. Joining the bits and scraps together they present a continuous story, many important points of which are now attested {to} by the revelations of the trial. The story is thrilling enough for yellow covers, and it throws a matchless limelight on important sections of the Labor Movement in America. Leaving out the profanity, which is simply indicated in dashes, the dialogue is reproduced below under the title:

**“On the Roaring Billows,” or “Talking It Over.”**

[N.B. The only insertions here made are “M,” which stands for Murphy, and “B,” which stands for Black. These initials, of course, did not appear on the wireless telegraphic plates. But they are inserted to help the reader understand the conversation. For the rest, the context sufficiently indicates when it is that Murphy speaks and when Black.]

M.—I got the dough in me pocket.

B.—The whole of it?

M.—Not all I hoped to squeeze from the contractors. Only \$10,000. I also had to drop a couple of hundred in New York to keep some them fellows’ traps shut. But I have almost \$10,000 left, and that will do, John. We’ll have a — of a good time in England and Ireland. When ’tis up I’ll return to New York and make another haul.

B.—The wonder to me is how you do it.

M.—Dead easy; yes, — — easy. ’Tis this way, see: When men apply for admission to our union we takes in only as many as we need to make a good appearance. Then we puts up a stiff initiation fee. That keeps rafts of others out.

B.—But does the rank and file allow that?

M.—Keep your shirt on, will ye? You will see how we fix ’em.

B.—Who is “we” and who is “them?”

M.—You are bloody blind. “We” means the principal officers of the union and two or three dummies of the rank and file who are needed on the floor to raise a row or raise “points of order,” when some of the others are getting too fresh, and to move to “lay it on the table” when some — — impudent motion is made by some — — — — of a freshy who wants its fingers in the pie, or by some — — — — — — of a Socialist Labor Party

man, who smells a rat (I tell you, these S.L.P. men have sharp noses!) and wants to expose us. They call us "fakirs," the — — —.

B.—They are — — —.

M.—Well, those are "we"; all the others, rank and file and some few dunderhead officers are "them." See?

B.—I see.

M.—Well, where did I break off? Oh, yes. When more men apply for admission to the union than is convenient—

B.—In what way "convenient?"

M.—Shut up! You will understand if you keep that trap of yours closed ten minutes. If more apply than is CONVENIENT, we raises the initiation. If they are ready to pay that, we raises the initiation still higher. If still anyone will pay that, we simply gets one of our dummies on the floor to move to "shut the door," and then none more is admitted.

B.—But in what way does that help you?

M.— — — — —, won't you wait? When we has a whole lot of fellows out of the union, and work enough for all the members, and more hands are wanted, those outside fellows gets work from the building contractors, and we shut our eyes. We grumble, but don't do more.

B.—I don't see what you are driving at.

M.—You'll see soon enough. Then on some fine day, when we knows a contractor is particularly hard crowded by some other contractors, and he would do anything to avoid trouble and not fill his contract, up we marches, a committee of us, and see the contractor. Do you begin to see now?

B.—I'll be — if I do.

M.—You must be — — dull. We, the committee—we always calls ourselves "the committee" in such cases—we marches up to the contractor, and we lays before him a sheet of paper neatly executed. On that sheet, we usually gets some hungry and thirsty Social Democratic leader to write up that sheet and give him a quarter, or maybe a dollar and a drink for his pains.

B.—Who are these Social Democrats?

M.—Don't you know? I'll tell you presently. Well, we shows the sheet to the contractor. On that sheet he reads black on white, dates and all, that on such and such days he employed non-union men, and how many of them. We then shows the union by-law, or the clause in the agreement with him providing for a fine in such cases. So many non-union men employed; so much fine on each; rest is easy multiplication. See?

B.—Yes. A — fine plan!

M.—Now you see why 'tis CONVENIENT to keep rafts of men outside of the union?

B.—Yes, by — I see. — CONVENIENT!

M.—You bet. The more fellows we keep out, the more of these fellows the contractor is bound to employ. And that means bigger fines for "We, Us & Co."

B.—And the contractor planks down the currency?

M.—Occasionally he refuses; then we strike.

B.—But the men on strike—don’t they suffer hardships?

M.—To — with them! There is where the Social Democrats come in handy. At one time the Volks Zeitung Corporation was run by the Socialist Labor Party, and then we got it in the neck hard and heavy. I remember, it was in March and April of 1899 when something of that sort was tried by the Marble Polishers’ Union. *The People*, the English organ of the Socialist Labor Party, which was then published by the corporation soaked it into us. Lord, how it lashed us. We bribed the corporation to silence *The People*, but the — — paper wouldn’t be muzzled. We then managed to get the *Volks Zeitung* to take our part, and I’ll be — if that *People* didn’t turn its guns on the *Volks Zeitung*, too, and rip it up fore and aft. We then pulled together to help the Corporation capture *The People* and smash up the Socialist Labor Party. We furnished it with men from Klein’s Union. You know Klein, the Tammany office-holder? But we failed. Our men and the Corporation’s men were beaten back; it was on July 10, 1899; and that — — paper has kept up its war against us and even became a daily paper to hit us all the more frequently. But we gained something. The “Volks Zeitung” Corporation emancipated itself from the Socialist Labor Party, started an English paper of its own, got up a new party, the Social Democratic Party, and its men stands by us. Some gets part of the swag, others are mere asses—Hanford, for instance, in his Typographical Union. He was a S.L.P. man and dead against us, joined the Volks Zeitung Corporation party and got and kept for quite a while a fat job from the officers of his union. The two papers of the Corporation and the men of its party hold up our end. When we declare one of these strikes and the rank and file is thrown out of work and kept out until we got our fines collected from the contractor, the Volks Zeitung Corporation, through its two papers and the men of its party, calls it a “noble waging of the class struggle.” This cost us money, sometimes a good deal, but it helps Us & Co., and softens the lashings we gets from *The People*, and the Social Democrats in our unions even help us to drown the outcry against us raised by the S.L.P. men and, while the two fight we have somewhat a clear field. If only the S.L.P. could be killed the coast would be entirely clear.

B.—Quite a scheme, — —.

M.—And so this time our committee demanded from the Master Builders of Brooklyn \$50,000 as fines.

B.—\$50,000!

M.—But it was no go. It was impossible to get that. We came down to \$40,000, to \$25,000, to \$13,000, and finally to \$10,000. That we got as fines for the non-union men that we barred from the union. Ha! ha!

B.—That’s the — — smartest scheme. ’Tis decidedly INCONVENIENT to admit all the men of the trade into the union. It is decidedly CONVENIENT, — —, so to have a good number of them out.

M.—You bet! We has, in the aggregate, collected \$200,000 from the contractors as fines under the threat of a strike for their employing non-union men. Ha! ha! ha! To — with the rank and file! We “nobly wages the class struggle,” we does, on the backs of the rank and file!

B. and M.—Ha! ha! ha!

Here the snatches of the dialogue preserved by the out-bound wireless telegraph plates end. The sound waves became blurred in the hilarity of the speakers.

Murder will out. If the scientists who handled those plates did not know enough to see the point, conditions in New York—political and economic—have brought on Murphy’s trial, and that is bringing out the facts, which tally with the statements in the dialogue above reproduced, and which that dialogue helps to clarify.

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