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EDITORIAL

THE CARNEGIE DISCUSSION.

By DANIEL DE LEON

IN the earlier part of this year a book was published with the somewhat lengthy title, *The History of the Carnegie Steel Company. An Inside Review of Its Humble Origin and Impressive Growth.*

This book created a furor. Aside from the fact that it is sold for the extraordinary price of \$100 a copy, its author, James Howard Bridge, once a secretary of Andrew Carnegie, exposed the preposterous claims to Carnegie to the honor of being the foremost steel and ironmaster of this or any other age. The book went further: it not only exposed the absurd pretensions of “Canny Andy,” but showed that his soubriquet was well bestowed, for the book is a record of expropriation, not only of “laurel wreaths filched from the tombs of the dead,” but wealth filched from the hands of the living, by an individual who out-Machiavellies Machiavelli.

For a time this book, having served as a nine day wonder, was allowed to fall into “innocuous desuetude,” but it is once more being taken up, with results that are likely to provoke an animated discussion. It is being published serially in a Pittsburg Sunday newspaper, thus giving it a wider publicity. It is also being reviewed by John Brisben Walker in *The Cosmopolitan*. This review is an apology and a defense. Its aim is the rehabilitation of Carnegie. And it seems that Carnegie will be the centre of the discussion that the book is provoking.

That Carnegie should be the pivot around which this discussion should revolve seems logical in view of the fact that he is attacked; but it is entirely inconsistent with the thesis of the book as given in its preface, for in that thesis it is not Carnegie who is attacked but capitalism; it is not one “captain of industry” who is exposed, but all of them! In fact, according to this thesis the book is a Socialist invective against capitalist exploitation.

In order to make this clear, this quotation from the preface of the book is now appropriate:

“The Carnegie Steel Company, as will be seen from this narrative, is not the creation of any man, nor any set of men. It is a natural evolution; and the conditions of its growth are of the same general character as those of the ‘flower in the crannied wall.’ Andrew Carnegie has somewhere said in effect: Take away all our money, our great works, ore mines, and coke ovens, but leave our organization, and in four years I shall have re-established myself. He might have gone a step further and eliminated himself and his organization; and in less than four years the steel industry would have recovered the loss. This is not the popular conception of industrial evolution which demands captains, corporals, and other heroes; but it accords with evolutionary conceptions in general.”

What is this, if it is not essentially Socialist doctrine? Socialism declares all industry social in origin, growth and operation, and demands its social ownership, a demand perfectly in accord with the character of industry. And when the author of the history under consideration makes the statement quoted, he consciously or unconsciously (more likely the latter) demands, not the triumph of Frick over Carnegie, as has been intimated, but the triumph of Socialism over capitalism. Anyway, whether he so demands or not that is the inevitable logic of his position.

Let the discussion go on. Let us, in the words of Goethe, have “light, more light”—it will reveal the gangrene of civilization and compel the application of remedies to the diseased parts.

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