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EDITORIAL

“TRIBUTE TO THE UNIONS.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

VERILY, a heart of flint must he harbor in his breast who makes it his business to harass the employing class. Are not these worthies sufficiently harassed by the law of their own deviltry, to an extent that they are driven into all sorts of contradictions, like folks possessed? Here is an instance, or rather twain.

The disaster of San Francisco brought on a scarcity of all things needed. Did you want food or raiment, tobacco or shoes, liquor or headgear? The price had gone up. It seemed cruel; it seemed extortion; it looked like profiting by a calamity, like taking advantage of the misfortunes of others. But all this only “seemed.” It was mere sentimentalism to look at it in that light. The law of that best of all possible social systems, Capitalism, has a wisdom that soars above merely weakling sentimentality. Its law is the law of Struggle—a fair field, for each to knock the others’ teeth out, and no favors. All having equal opportunities, none being handicapped, the race is to the swiftest, the battle to the strongest, and thus, by the Jungle law of the “survival of the fittest” and “natural selection,” the unfit are weeded out, the fit remain, and a “vigorous, self-reliant, pushing humanity” survives to the greater glory of God. Accordingly, the capitalists of ’Frisco refused to be sentimental and decided to steer straight towards “the greater glory of God.” “Any harm in that?” they would ask a poor devil shivering with cold internally and externally, and with not half enough to pay the swollen price of a suit of clothes, let alone of clothes and a glass of brandy, to boot, “Any harm in our raised prices? If you have anything to sell, you have equal chances with us. So, then, pay or move on!”

The lofty morality thus preached by word and practice took hold of the working people. ’Tis true, they had neither clothes or whiskey to sell, nor yet hats or coats,

but they had labor-power to sell. It was needed; it was needed badly—as much as food and raiment. “One man’s misfortunes is another’s chance,” so sedulously preached, and so strictly practiced by the capitalist class, was forthwith put into practice by the workers. The law of the jungle was applied. Labor-power went up. It rose 20, it rose 30 per cent. In short, it rose emulously with the rise of the commodities that the capitalists had for sale. But lo, instead of applause, there was a rumbling, and the rumbling grew to a thundering, and the thundering exploded in a volcanic eruption of indignation. “The rascally selfishness of the workingmen,” thus ran the capitalist anger, “will insure the downfall of ’Frisco!” “Unheard of treason,” screamed another, “I thought I could get a house built for \$100,000, but find it will cost me \$150,000 extra!”

Unhappy, harassed capitalist class! A sad fatality pursues it. No sooner does the capitalist utter some exalted principle of combined ethics and economics than he is driven to “reverse action.” The capitalist press, pulpiteers, professors and politicians who are whimpering over the trials of capitalism in ’Frisco, denounce the added price demanded of them for labor-power as “tribute to the Unions.” There are cruel people who call it a case of being “hoisted by your own petard.”

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

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slpns@slp.org