

DAILY PEOPLE



VOL. 6, NO. 216.

NEW YORK, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 1906.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

“ETHICS” AND “NECESSITY”.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE Ethics and Necessity of Labor Unions” was the subject upon which John F. Tobin of the A.F. of L. spoke before the Congregational ministers’ meeting in Boston on the 29th of January. Mr. Tobin’s address furnished cumulative evidence of the fact that the “Ethics” of the unionism which he advocates is of the nature of the “snakes in Ireland”—they do not exist; and that the “Necessity” for such unionism is urgent—to the capitalist class.

Said Mr. Tobin, as reported in quotation marks by the Boston *Globe* of the same day:

“The trades union bases its claim for existence on the fact that the buyer and the seller of labor should occupy equal grounds. . . . The employer declares that he has a right to receive fair profits—WHICH IS UNDISPUTED.”

“Horse-fly” means horse-fly, an insect that sucks up the blood of horses; “horse” means horse, a noble animal whom the horse-fly torments, and who would be all the better off if there were no horse-flies. He who says “horse-fly” and “horse” implies the two things—provided his ethics binds him to mean what he says and to say what he means. Obviously, the ism of the man who were to say: “The horse bases his claim for existence on the fact that the horse-fly and the horse should occupy equal grounds”—is an ism in which “Ethics” can figure only as snakes figure in Ireland—by their absence. Such is the fix of Mr. Tobin’s unionism. “Seller of labor” means the proletarian—a being who is produced by a social system that lowers him from the rank of human to that of merchandise, that which he sells being, in the last analysis, himself; “buyer of labor” means capitalist—the being, whose class brought about the system that produces the proletarian, who upholds that system, and who cannot exist without the continuance of the proletarian. The ism that bases

its claim for existence on the fact that the “buyer” and the “seller of labor” should occupy equal grounds, holds identical ground with the man whose ism were to declare that “the horse bases his claim for existence on the fact that the horse-fly and the horse should occupy equal grounds”. He who holds such language either recklessly shoots off his mouth on an important question without recking what he is talking about, or he speaks against better knowledge.—No “Ethics” there, in either case.

Again, the ism that were to say: “The horse-fly declares that he has a right to a fair share of the horse’s blood—WHICH IS UNDISPUTED” is unquestionably a “Necessity” for the horse-fly. No horse-fly, either individually or as horse-flydom, would otherwise than dote on such an ism. Such is the “Necessity” of Mr. Tobin’s unionism. The unionism that accepts as “undisputed” the declaration of the capitalist horse-fly that he has a right to receive fair profits (enough proletarian blood, marrow and bone to live on) is undisputedly a “Necessity” to the capitalist class; why, it is the breath in the nostrils of the capitalist horse-fly.

So say we all! So know we all! So knowing and saying the awakening proletariat is organizing to cast off its back the “Ethical” Tobins, together with their Unionism, that is becoming so rotten-ripe for overthrow that it can no longer suppress the stench of its “Necessity” to capitalism.

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

Uploaded February 2009

slpns@slp.org