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EDITORIAL

THE SUFFRAGETTES UP AGAINST IT.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THAT “discrimination” is one thing, “qualification” another; that the Constitution allows the legislature to determine “qualification” but forbids it to “discriminate” between citizens; that to determine the age when the exercise of the suffrage shall be allowed is “qualification” and therefore legitimate, seeing that any citizen may at one time in his life attain the qualification of age, whereas to forbid the ballot to a sex is “discrimination” and therefore illegitimate, seeing that the question of sex rests not with the legislature; and consequently that the refusal of the suffrage to woman being “discrimination” and not a case of “qualification,” is unconstitutional—this was a veritable shower of brilliant arrows, each a stroke of genius, shot by Miss Mary Coleman at the Judges of the Appellate Division on the 20th of this month, in her argument for a writ of mandamus to compel an election board to register the vote of Dr. Julia Seton Sears.

Did the argument tell? The report is to the effect that “the judges joined heartily in the uproar of laughter that followed this explanation.”

Miss Coleman ran “up against it.” She said to the court: “The trouble with you men is that you do not know.” They do know. They know but too well. But does Miss Coleman know what it is she ran “up against”?

The capitalist class—and that class consists of women as well as men: it has its Anna Gould Castellane-Sagans as well as its Rockefellers, its Katherine Elkins-would-be-Princess-of-the-Abruzzis as well as its Morgans, its Hetty Greens as well as its Stillmans—the capitalist class is set against the exercise of suffrage by the working class. It was not so originally. In its revolutionary or infant days, capitalism needed and, therefore, set up universal suffrage as one of its ideals. That time is over. Full grown capitalism, having attained the upmost round, now unto the ladder turns its back and scorns the base degrees by which it did ascend. To-day

capitalism is kicking as hard as it dare against the ladder of universal suffrage—undermining it as insidiously as it knows how. The reason is plain. To every capitalist, female and male, there are now not less than two hundred proletarian voters. Given these facts, the extension of the suffrage to woman would only increase the danger or annoyance that capitalism already scents in a male proletarian army of suffrage holders—it would increase the danger by the female proletarian contingent that would be added to the already dreaded male and voting proletariat.

Class instincts are not susceptible to a logic that puts their interests in jeopardy. Upon that iron shield Miss Coleman’s arrows leave no impression, except the impression of mirth. Water upon a duck’s back is “not it” with argument, however cogent, dropped upon the petrified class-conscious capitalist mind.

Miss Coleman’s genius is wasting its sweetness upon the desert air of the Appellate Division. The lady is tugging at one of the strings of a Revolution. Not in Courts are Revolutions settled; Revolutions settle Courts.

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

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