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EDITORIAL

“REFORM” AND “REFORMERS.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE pregnant incident of the Carnegies, and other wholesale fleecers of the working class, being approached by begging committees of the Social Democracy of Greater New York, and their gifts being accepted in order to re-build the Brooklyn Labor Lyceum, throws timely light upon the mental and moral make-up of “Reformers,” and upon what these understand as “Reform.”

The beggars and recipients of these gifts do not simply apologize; they go further; they justify their conduct. And how? They do so with the argument that these capitalists are plunderers; that the Labor Movement demands the expropriation of the expropriators; and, THEREFORE, that to pocket donations from these, is in the nature of expropriation, it is a step in the right direction.

None better than this attitude demonstrates the contention of the Socialist Labor Party that “Reform” is a caricature of the bona fide Labor Movement, calculated only to render the latter ridiculous, and that the “Reformer” is a moral and mental leper.

The capitalist is a plunderer; the Labor Movement demands the expropriation of the expropriators. These are sound, irrefutable, straightout utterances of the Socialist Labor Party. But what does “expropriation” mean? It means that the robber, who has deprived one of his property, shall be made to restore the whole of his plunder, and, above all, that he shall be incapacitated from thereafter repeating his depredations. Out of charity, the robber may be granted a crumb so as to prevent his dying of starvation, an unregenerated malefactor; a crumb may be donated to him in order to enable him to live, and mend his ways. The donor is not HE, but the aggrieved party; the crumb falls to HIM, not to {the} avenger; the kindness, the generosity are attributes exercised not by the malefactor, they are exercised by the redresser of wrong. The begging is done by the expropriatee, not by the expropriator. Obviously absurd is all interpretation of the term “expropriation” that reverses this order: that makes a donor, a crumbs-bestower, a generous

individual out of the robber, and turns the robbed into a donee, a crumbs-receiver, a beneficiary. If it is thus with regard to a plain robber, it is infinitely more so with regard to the legalized robber, the representative, upholder and beneficiary of a social system of robbery,—the CAPITALIST.

The capitalist is a plunderer of workingmen. All the wealth he has represents such plunder. Taking Carnegie as a type, the amount of wealth held by the capitalist is in direct ratio to the number of his fleeced, victimized workingmen. But this is not yet the real FEATURE of the capitalist. His plunder is but a manifestation. The real feature of the capitalist is not the ownership of vast piles of wealth consumable in enjoyment, it is his ownership of the machinery of production, the club by means of which he can make the workingmen “stand and deliver,” and thus expropriate them of the vast fruits of their labor. It is, accordingly, not childishness, it is, accordingly, not folly to nibble a few crumbs in the shape of a few hundred or a thousand dollars, from the fruits of the wholesale plunder, and leave the bulk of the plunder, including the club with which to carry on the plunder, in the hands of the plunderer, and call that “expropriating the expropriators” and “a step in the right direction.” Such conduct is infamy. It is sailing under false colors. It is putting a sensible principle to a laughable use. It is decking poltroonery with the feathers of bravery. It is opening the doors to corruption in the livery of that purity that the Social Revolution implies. It is opening for a bribe the palm that should grasp the avenger’s sword.

The “reformer’s” tactics, his “step in the right direction” lead only away from the path of science, and, consequently, of manhood and purity; they lead, with accelerating rapidity, down, inevitably, into the mephitic bogs towards which the Kangaroo, along with his *Volkszeitung* and his Social Democracy, wended his way when he was kicked down the stairs of the Socialist Labor Party’s headquarters, on the night of July 10, 1899, and in which he is now wallowing with his Homestead-Carnegies and his Coolie-Hearsts.

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