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EDITORIAL

THE “SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

THERE is a certain argument that the employing class and its apostles love to make in favor of the capitalist system with more than ordinary gusto. It is the argument of “the survival of the fittest.” The expression is expected to give their social system a sort of scientific justification; it also serves to imply that those at war with capitalism are simply unfit. What is really meant by “fit” and “unfit” in the capitalist mouth has been more than once exposed in these columns. An article in the *Evening Post* of recent date affords an opportunity to expose the false pretence from a new side.

Commenting upon recent strikes, ordered, as for instance, one in Indianapolis, with the design of securing the discharge of men who worked too rapidly, the *Post* says:

“Nothing need be said of the disastrous influence of this policy upon the industries involved, OR OF ITS EFFECT IN HOLDING BACK THE MORE EFFICIENT WORKMEN, AND LEVELING DOWN TO THE STANDARD OF THE POOREST MEN, INSTEAD OF ALLOWING THE BEST TO SET THE PACE.”

The first part of this paragraph, the one not underscored, though highly interesting in explaining the meaning of the close relations established between the Hannas, on the one hand, and the Gomperses, on the other, shall be taken up another time. It is the second, the underscored passage, that is here to be considered.

Animals, such as Seton-Thompson would write about in his *Lives of the Hunted*,¹ are improved by the strain put upon them to escape with their lives. In places where foxes, wolves, coyotes, goats, deer, etc., are waged war on by one

¹ [*Lives of the Hunted*, Seton-Thompson, Ernest. New York, Charles Scribners, 1901.]

another, especially by man, a specimen of the species in existence presumes a highly developed specimen, one that by a long line of natural selection has inherited a maximum of strong and a maximum {minimum?} of weak points. In such cases the fittest has survived, and its survival marks a high notch on the evolutionary scale. But what would be the case with the workers subjected to the *Post's* evolutionary process?

In the technique of the *Post's* evolutionary process, an “efficient workman” means a “rapid workman,” and this implies intense concentration of thought. Let the pace be set by the most “efficient workman,” and what is the result? Just the reverse of that seen with the hunted in the animal kingdom. In the animal kingdom some of the hunted survive and these are magnificent specimens; in the wage-slave kingdom, the effect would be rapid deterioration, wholesale consumption of forces, and annihilation, leaving the supply to be furnished from the ever lowering ranks.

The “efficient workman” under capitalism would never receive in wages a sufficient amount of his own product to restore the tremendous consumption of fibre that his “efficiency” implies. Even if he were to receive more than the average, his wages would be small. Unable to recuperate his spent energies, and unable to lay by from his pittance the mammoth amount now needed for independence, the “rapid,” the “efficient” workman is but a prospective inmate of an asylum for physical wrecks.

Under capitalism, the “fittest workman” means the juiciest mutton chop to be devoured. As nothing but the picked bones survive in the mutton chop, the capitalist meaning of the “survival of the fittest” among the wage-slaves stands for the survival of bone-yard refuse.

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

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