

EDITORIAL

THE RISKS OF SAN PIETRO.

By DANIEL DE LEON

“**W**K. VANDERBILT’S *San Pietro*, ridden by O’Neill, ran third in the race for the *Prix des Chautepies*, of 4,000 francs, at St. Cloud to-day.”—So ran the despatches from Paris in the morning papers of September 20.

“A New York Central freight train early to-day ran through a gang of laborers near Tonawanda, killing three of them.”—So ran the despatches from Buffalo, on the evening of the same day.

Behold the equality that obtains in our boasted land of no classes: on one hand the owner of the railroad, engaged in the pleasant sport of racing, surrounded by gaiety, music, bright clothes and dashing dames; on the other, his workmen, snatched from a terrible life of ill requited toil and misery only by a still more terrible death.

However, the stinging social contrast presented by the two items is not the most valuable point of their lesson. The most valuable point is the light they jointly throw upon the capitalist claim that the towering profits enjoyed by the employer are the due reward of business risk.

“The employer runs all the risk, it is but fair he should reap the returns,” is the plea.

But does he?

Taking the case before us, we find that:

The capitalist does indeed risk his money, his credit, and his factory or plant; but—

The workingman risks his health, his life and his limb.

The capitalist may lose everything he risks and yet his existence as a physical entity is not destroyed thereby. What he has lost is no part of himself. He is maimed

of none of his organs, none of his faculties, none of his capacity as a human unit; while—

The workingman, when his risk overtakes him, is assailed in his very being. What he loses is an integral part of his own body. If not killed outright, like Vanderbilt's three trackmen, he is rendered an invalid or a cripple for life.

The capitalist thus runs the lighter, the more inconsiderable risk, and receives therefor the massive share of the returns; whereas—

The workingman runs the most intimate, the most haunting risk, and gets therefor only one-fifth of the proceeds of his own industry. Finally,

The workingman runs his risk not voluntarily, but because he must do so to gain even the most meager subsistence. The dangers that encompass him are not of his choosing, but have been cast upon him. His is the plight of the wayfarer forced to follow a route infested with road agents; but conversely—

The capitalist runs his risk out of his own sweet will, not for a living but in the pursuit of luxury and idleness. The dangers that he must brave flow not from the working class but from his own class, his rivals and competitors, who are even {ever} striving to pull him down that their own position may be more secure. His troubles are those of the highwayman brawling with his mates over a division of the spoils; or, to put the thing in the racing language to which the polite ears of Mr. Vanderbilt are perhaps better attuned, his risks are merely the risks of *San Pietro*.

Are the risks of *San Pietro* entitled to greater return than the risks of Man—or to any return at all?

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded September 2011

slpns@slp.org