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EDITORIAL

WONDROUS ARE THE WAYS OF THE CAPITALIST.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THERE is just now a “movement” in Brooklyn that deserves close scrutiny. It sails under the colors of “Municipal Ownership.” Just now this term is a catching rallying cry. Municipal ownership is the right thing. There can be nothing more calculated to enlist public sympathy than such a rallying cry. So far so good. But it happens often in the history of man that self-seeking schemers take up popular cries simply to use the public for their own selfish ends. The present “movement” is a case in point. It is intended to use the workingmen’s vote as a cat’s-paw whereby to snatch off the oven some cherished chestnuts in the shape of public franchises for a lot of scheming “reformers.” The “movement” has no other object than to secure for certain private individuals private ownership of franchises, and this is to be done under the cloak of a “municipal ownership” agitation.

These are the facts: Mr. Tom Johnson of Cleveland is a wealthy manufacturer and owner of street railway lines. He has a steam yacht and other luxuries, paid for, of course, with the wealth produced by his employees and out of which he skins them, as a genuine capitalist. Tom sails under the colors of the single tax and a “reformer” generally. For many years he has had his eyes upon a slice of the pie in Brooklyn. In 1887, when the George movement struck Brooklyn, Tom was “enthusiastic” for it, and he was hand in glove with all the Democratic wire-pullers in Brooklyn for the purpose of getting some franchise to enable him to own railroads there. Things did not turn out as Tom expected; the plan dropped out of sight, but not out of mind. Just now it is revived with the aid of Tommy Shearman, Mr. Wolf and some other worthies.

Tom Johnson and his brother own the Nassau Electric Company in South Brooklyn. They want to get franchises to extend their lines to Canarsie Bay. As Democrats, they stand no show of getting what they want from a Republican and reform municipal government in Brooklyn. They want the Democrats to get in, and to get in by the aid of the Johnsons. In that case the Democratic victors will remember their understrappers and grant the Johnsons the franchises after which they are hankering.

Keeping these facts in mind, the whole scheme becomes transparent. The Johnsons started the "movement" for "municipal ownership," and they promise the Knights of Labor employment. The Knights are expected to be humbugged into enthusing for the "movement," they are expected to allow themselves to be led back into the shambles of the Democratic party, to boom and elect those politicians, who, it is also expected, will promise "municipal ownership," and who, once elected, will forget all about it, and grant the Johnsons the franchises they are after. That done, the Knights can go whistle. They and all the workers they may have pulled along will have "learned" another lesson, to wit, that the capitalists have no use for them but as voting cattle.

The scheme is pretty, but it will fail. Already it is booming, thanks to a dozen fakirs, whose services are enlisted. But the day of the fakirs is substantially over. Labor is too much scarred by experience to fall into the Johnson-Shearman-Wolf trap.

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

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