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EDITORIAL

A HIGHER LAW.

By DANIEL DE LEON

A McKinley paper heads the report of the convention of the Metal Workers, held in Indianapolis, with the contemptuous words: "All Wrong To Be Rich." The writer of the heading is a better photographer of the capitalist mind than he wot. In this short heading he portrays both the backwardness of capitalist economics, and, as the result, the back-number fit of capitalist morality.

Time was when to be rich, that is to say, to have a competence laid by, was all right. The moral sense that approved of such a thing was not a thing of air; it stood upon its feet. Those were the days of small things, the days of small production, the days of the small tool. Those, accordingly, were the days when "industry," "frugality," "thrift," words like these and maxims based on them, had sense. Those were the days when the individual could be the architect of his own home; and not without a color of justice was want ascribed to laziness or improvidence. To be rich then was all right. With its roots deep in the then economic conditions, deep in economic fact, the moral conception of right was then correct; consequently, pure; consequently, wholesome. But the economic conditions of those days have changed, the then facts have been destroyed; other conditions, other facts exist to-day.

To-day, thanks to the mammoth size of the tools (capital) that are necessary for production, "industry," "thrift," "frugality" have lost their meaning of old. The more industrious the workingman is to-day, the more he produces, all the quicker is he thrown out of work, and "over-production" leaves him to starve. To-day, accordingly, wealth is no longer the reward of thrift, frugality and industry. To-day, wealth, while remaining the fruit of labor, has become the reward of idleness;—a reward that falls wholly into the lap of the plunderer, the capitalist class.

Under such changed conditions, the morality of old is baseless. A principle ceases to be moral when it ceases to stand on facts.

The Socialist movement is guided by the light of a Higher Law because it stands upon living, not dead facts. Ignorant of the changes, or the meaning of such

changes, that the industrial world has undergone, Capitalism still worships at a shrine of morality whence the Spirit has wholly departed. Capitalism, consequently, is to-day the incarnation of immorality. To-day, large possessions, riches, imply crime.

Yes, indeed, under a McKinley-Bryan-capped social system, it is all wrong to be rich. Riches can never more be pure until the day when the dome of the Socialist Republic shall have been reared; when poverty shall no longer be the reward of toil, with wealth the reward of idleness.

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