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“MAKE THEM WORK, BY GOD!”

By DANIEL DE LEON

The above is the order that the captain of the steamship *La Bretagne* gave when the steerage passengers refused to work as stokers in place of the strikers who had left the ship at Havre. And he did make them work.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said that an ocean steamship is the microcosm of the civilization of its time. It reproduces afloat in compressed form the genius of the age in the arts, technical progress and even government. If Ralph Waldo Emerson lived to-day, with the *La Bretagne* experience before him, he would have found material to amplify his brilliant summary.

On the ocean liner of to-day, with its steerage and its miseries; the second class with its shoddy pretences; the first class, with its idle luxury, and the inhumanly overworked stokers, with the brutal slave drivers, known as officers, one sees a facsimile of the social and industrial life ashore, with this difference, however, that on the ocean there is no lying pretence of equality, no cant indulged in as to there being “no classes.”

When this brute-lackey of the capitalist class said: “Make them work, by God!” and then forced the proletarians in the steerage to labor in the awful heat of the ship’s furnaces, he only did that openly which on shore is done sneakingly. The wage slave must be forced to do the work of the world, with the whip of hunger usually, but if that fails, then the Democratic-Republican bourgeois throws off the mask of “Freedom of Contract” and resorts to brute force.

What a commentary on the social system of to-day lies in that expression: “Make them work, by God!” What a scorchingly bright light it throws on the flimsy pretences and veils behind which the slave-catcher seeks to hide! What a lesson it teaches the working class here and everywhere! How it should clear the heads and nerve the hearts of the proletarians the world over to smash to flinders that system and that class under whose rule this dictum of the slave driver is the rule of life.

Let this inhuman snarl of the capitalist ring in the ears of the working class voters until they march to the ballot box and smash the Rep.-Dem. capitalist party with the Socialist Labor Party ballot; then, under a social system fit for humans, let them answer the whine of the dethroned parasite with the stern command: “Make them work, by God!”

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

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