

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 5, NO. 150.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1904.

TWO CENTS.

EDITORIAL

WHERE RIGHTEOUSNESS FAILS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE “Intellectuality” of the capitalist class is being tested. The spread of Socialism alarms them. They cannot be blamed for that. Perhaps it will be said that they cannot be blamed either for the headless-chicken antics that their alarm throws them into. If a chicken is brainless, even when its poor little head is on, what must be its intellectual plight with that poor little head off? Capitalist class “Intellectuality” may, upon that reasoning, be as little blame-worthy for its antics as for the justifiable fact of its alarm. All that, notwithstanding the antics, present a profitable spectacle for contemplation.

“Concentration of capital,” “Monopoly,” “Trusts,” these are common terms in the Socialist vocabulary. By them the Socialist never means that the process of trustification has reached its acme. The Socialist knows and makes the point clear, that, despite the height trustifications have reached, they do not yet wholly exclude competition. What, upon that head, the Socialist claims with irrefutable proof is that the process of trustification is narrowing the area of competition to only the gigantic concerns; so that, while competition still continues among these giants, increasing numbers of smaller concerns are being excluded, and consequently have to compete all the fiercer among themselves. The “Intellectuality” of the capitalist class, too near-sighted to perceive the fact in its two aspects, perceives only the still extant large number of still unabsorbed and fiercely competing smaller fry concerns, and triumphantly points to them as a refutation {sic} of the Socialist theory of vanishing competition. That is the normal posture of the “Intellectuality” of the capitalist class. Now, athwart these gentlemen’s complacency, comes the fact of Socialist growth: alarm overtakes them: whereupon the capers start. Prof. Felix Adler and Commissioner Carroll D. Wright are now occupying the center of the circus as the leading caperers—the former with lectures on the “Spiritual Basis of

Democracy,” the latter with lectures on “Righteousness the Remedy.” All of which implies a complete somersault back—back a good deal further than the Socialist’s attitude upon Trusts.

The Socialist attitude on Trusts is not, as shown above, that the process of trustification is complete; the “Intellectuality” of the capitalist class’s attitude is, as shown above, that the stage of competition still is the normal, dominant stage of society. Where does “Spirituality” or “Righteousness” in the matter of wages come in if the latter theory be true? “Righteousness” could, would, or should have a place only under conditions where trustification has reached completion—without a break-down of the social fabric. It must be granted, at least theoretically, that if society could reach a stage of complete trustification without breaking down, and such an up-to-latest-date patriarchal system of Trust autocracy could be imagined—then, indeed “Righteousness” should be invoked. For one thing, “Righteousness” would be the only salve to such a yoke; for another thing, “Righteousness” could be applicable without its cutting its own throat—an essential condition to the exercise of “Righteousness.” What master ever sacrificed masterhood to an abstract idea?

But the basis for “Righteousness” is not the basis on which is poised the attitude of the “Intellectuality” of the capitalist class. They deny even the present stage of trustification, let alone its stage of competition. Their basis is the basis of dominant competition. Upon that basis “Righteousness” is out of all question. It is out of all question not because some people may not like to apply it, but because they can not. They can not because “Righteousness” is no natural born suicide. Where men compete with each other, they are intent upon the reduction of the cost of production. The factor least capable to resist lower purchasing prices is Labor. “Righteousness” is ground to dust in the shock of competition that places before the competitor the alternative of either lower wages and solvency, or “Righteousness” and bankruptcy.

In the measure that the “Intellectuality” of the capitalist class is correct as to the dominancy of competition, all their talk about “Spirituality” and “Righteousness” is so much gabble. In the measure that their talk is not gabble, they abandon their own and place themselves upon Socialist ground. In either case

they are fit subjects for the “Righteous” and “Spiritual” pity of the Socialists, who can not but pity the volume of intellectual cripples that capitalism rears.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded August 2007

slpns@slp.org