

EDITORIAL

LET THE LIGHT SPREAD.

By DANIEL DE LEON

A WELL-KNOWN woman once remarked that she had repeated a certain childhood story so often that she no longer knew whether it applied to her or her younger sister. That is the fix of the manufacturing interests of the country to-day. So long have they rehashed certain yarns for the benefit of the working class that they now no longer know whether those yarns apply to the workers, or to themselves.

One of these yarns is that about the “freedom” of labor. Labor is so delightfully unfettered. It can work or stop work, change employers at will, if it isn’t satisfied with its wages it can seek better, no one can compel it to do what it doesn’t want to, etc., etc., etc.

Now the Moving Pictures Patents Co., being a combination of all the leading moving picture film manufacturers, has begun to issue licenses to exhibitors. These licenses, to be paid for at specified rates, entitle the holder to purchase or rent films from the combination. Of course those who don’t want to pay the extra license fee in addition to the cost of the films, are rebelling. And what argument does the Moving Pictures Patents Co. use to silence them? Why, the same old yarn, in a new dress, of the “freedom of labor.”

“Licensed exhibitors,” says the *Moving Picture World*, “are not bound to the company by their licenses, and may discontinue the licensed service at any time. There can, then, be no question of the signing away of one’s ‘freedom,’ when ‘freedom’ is entirely a matter of personal option.”

Of course, no one is “bound” to the company. Only, if one doesn’t pay license tribute, he doesn’t get the best films, and that means lost business and possible extinction.

Hence, though no agreement to that effect exists, the exhibitor is by the very

law of his being, bound to the company. Just so it is with labor. Its boasted freedom lies in that no statute makes it a bondman. In truth, the law of its propertiless being makes it the most abject bondman of the centuries. If signing a license agreement is a loss of freedom, and done under virtual compulsion by the moving picture showman, how much more is not labor's begging and acceptance of a job at insufficient wages, a loss of freedom also?

It is not to be hoped that the moving picture men will learn by their fix the falseness of the claim of the "freedom of labor"; their bourgeois instincts are too thick a wall for that; but labor should profit by the object lesson now being projected on the screen for it.

Dark stars clashing in space, or capitalist blockheads of "combines" and "independents" clashing on earth, it is all one for Nature's purpose, and that is LIGHT. Let the light spread.

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