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EDITORIAL

THAWING ICEBERGS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

IN a recent one of those magazine articles which are compiling for the working class invaluable data on the criminality of their rulers, the statement was made that: "It is a significant commentary upon the sugar trust that since the day of its incorporation it has never built a new plant. Its whole work has been destructive."

The sentences are illustrative of a great and growing portion of the corporate activity of the time. The late E.H. Harriman himself, director when he died of forty-one railroads, was nowhere known as a builder, but only as a purchaser and a combiner, of railways. A few years ago the great Eastern Shipbuilding Company's plant at New London was closed up by the shipping trust—just bought and closed up. The increasing prevalence of graft and business corruption, the growing power and importance of Stock Exchanges, show that it is no longer industrial activity, but parasitism upon that activity, that more and ever more capitalists are looking to for their money.

All this denotes a dissolution. Of another period when a previous ruling class had outlived its usefulness, and the storm was gathering to sweep it away, Carlyle wrote:

"There then walks our French Noblesse. All in the old pomp of chivalry: and yet, alas, how changed from the old position; drifted far down from their native latitude, like Arctic icebergs got into the Equatorial sea, and fast thawing there! Once these Chivalry *Duces* (Dukes, as they are still named) did actually *lead* the world,—were it only towards battlespoil, where lay the world's best wages then: moreover, being the ablest Leaders going, they had their lion's share, those *Duces*; which none could grudge them. But now, when so many Looms, improved Ploughshares, Steam-Engines, and Bills of Exchange have been invented; and, for battle-brawling itself, men hire Drill-Sergeants at eighteen-pence a-day,—what

mean these goldmantled Chivalry Figures, walking there ‘in black velvet cloaks,’ in high-plumed ‘hats of a feudal cut’? Reeds shaken in the wind!”¹

Just so lies it with the ruling class of to-day, that same bourgeoisie which overthrew and swept away the “gold-mantled Chivalry Figures” of an outgrown feudality. Like the feudal lords, whom they superseded, the lords of capital once had a function to perform. That function was, led on by the desire for their own private profit, to spread industry, develop machinery, and teach the world co-operation. That function has now been almost, if not wholly, accomplished. The capitalists of to-day are, like the French noblemen of 1789, the relics of an outlived, outworn necessity. In the developed state of modern industry, in the storm which is gathering to sweep them to the ash-heap of civilization, they are, in Carlyle’s words, but “thawing icebergs” and “reeds shaken in the wind.”

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

Uploaded by Donna Bills, October 2010

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¹ [Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution*, Vol. I.—R.B.]