

EDITORIAL

## LOW SUCCEEDS PORTER.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**T**HE capitalist revolution against feudalism was in its spirit essentially heterodox, non-conformist, indeed, iconoclastic. It is substantially true that that was the first revolution recorded in history that sent veneration to the dogs, that not only cut off the head of royalty but that was essentially decisive. “Reverence” was a word not to be found in the dictionary of capitalism. That was the time when capitalism was the “under dog”. That time has changed, it is past; and then, as now, when it has become the “upper dog”, capitalism proceeds in the matter of “Reverence” upon the principle that Irreverence



SETH LOW (1850-1916)

... is young ambition's ladder,  
Whereto the climber-upward turns his face;  
But when he once attains the upmost round,  
He then unto the ladder turns his back,  
Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees  
By which he did ascend.<sup>1</sup>

Having now attained the upmost round, capitalism now turns its back unto the ladder of Irreverence. Its cue, now, in the day of its supremacy, is exactly the opposite of what that cue was in the day of capitalist subjection. In the day of its subjection, capitalism experienced the Reverence that its feudal masters and their accessories demanded of it to be a weapon in their hands against it, and it resisted the weapon; to-day, in the day of its supremacy, capitalism seeks to profit in its own interest by its experience in the past: at every turn it seeks to arm itself with the weapon of Reverence, in turn demanding for itself the reverential awe and admiration of the modern “under dog”—the Working Class. And to a great extent it has succeeded.

<sup>1</sup> [William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act II., Scene 1.]

Just as one time, the bourgeois looked up awe-stricken at his seigneur, now the wage-slave looks up awe-stricken at his capitalist plunderer. Now as then, however, there is behind the mask of sacred and deserving superiority nothing but the hideous features discovered behind the veil of the Veiled Prophet of Korhassan.<sup>2</sup> Nor should the day be distant when the modern “under dog” will make the discovery, just as did the former “under”, now “upper dog”. The capitalist class is itself piling on the evidence.

The embassy of a nation like this to a nation like France is a post of no mean importance. It requires vast learning and special knowledge on international law. The man to fill such a place should be one far above mediocrity. That post is now to become vacant, and who is pitched upon by the President to fill it? Seth Low. Mr. Low is a gentleman of no intellectual training. As a rich man’s son he has had the opportunities of schooling. But as sunbeams can not be extracted from cucumbers, even by the best appliances and means to-boot, neither could great degree of intelligence be extracted from the college-boy Low. He grew up and took charge of his father’s vast property, during which period there was no call for him even to reveal capitalist intelligence. The property could be run on the intellectual plane of cutting coupons. In point of literary ability Mr. Low is common place; in point of acquired knowledge he is insignificant. Not even the opportunities afforded him by his two Mayoralty incumbencies developed any quality in the man worthy of note. How low his intellectual plane is was painfully illustrated during his office of President of Columbia University. He filled the place on the plan of a country school, and as a member of the Hague Congress he was simply laughable. Now this is the man chosen for the embassy to France. What does it mean?

Marx points out that “the leadership of industry is an attribute of capital, just as in feudal times the functions of general and judge were attributes of landed property.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, during feudal times it was the ownership of landed property that elevated a man to positions of high distinction, and not his fitness for the office. Property took the place of fitness and knowledge. Likewise to-day. The Marxian passage, to the effect that it is the ownership of property and not fitness

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<sup>2</sup> [Al’Muqanna.]

<sup>3</sup> [Karl Marx, *Capital*, Chapter XIII, “Co-Operation.”]

that turns the capitalist into a “captain of industry”, may, accordingly, be extended to Mr. Low’s case and cover also positions of distinction filled by capitalists.

Of course, the mutton-headed landed proprietor of feudal times who became a Judge found it necessary to gather around his person a certain superstitious reverence. Without that his court would have been turned into a circus. And so to-day, when the Lows are elevated, thanks to their property, to positions of distinction, we find all the mouth-pieces of capitalism engaged in the effort to conceal the fact of what the lever of promotion actually is. Were the secret out touching this lever, the same as it is out with regard to feudal days, the capitalist class would to-day be what the feudal class has become—a nuisance abated.

Along the skirmish line of the Labor Movement one of the skirmishes turns around the veil that conceals the worthlessness of the Capitalist Class. The out-posts of Capitalism seek to keep up the veil and to keep it in repair; the out-posts of Socialism are tugging at the veil and rending it to shreds.

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