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EDITORIAL

SYMPATHY WANTED.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THAT Misery loves company is well known. That is a side of the medal which is familiar enough. But occasionally Misery, from being the under dog becomes, or seems to be dangerously near the point of becoming, the upper dog; and then, presto! the other side of the medal is turned to view. Then is seen the spectacle of that which is not Misery, but which helped to produce the Misery, cloaking and masquerading itself in the trappings of its formerly detested opposite in order to escape the retribution.

It was, perhaps, with a touch of some such feeling that so much was said recently in the panic about “unemployed capital.” “Unemployed capital” was lying here; “Unemployed capital” was languishing there. Great were the hardships of Unemployed capital. What harrowing pictures did not the word call up! The erstwhile rotund and beefy gentleman was visioned in the mind’s eye gaunt and unkempt. In imagination one could perceive him, like the recruit in the story, so scrawny you could see his “back from his front.” Not only he, but his family, his “sisters and his cousins and his aunts,” were apparently seen to be in dire distress and want. Slow starvation or quick suicide could dimly be descried, dogging their every footstep. And all as the result of his, capital’s, Unemployment! These things were known to occur in the case of laid-off workingmen, why not in the case of laid-off capital!

At least that is how it looked to those who allowed themselves to be hypnotized by the fluttering rags of poverty which the aforesaid poor gentleman, Unemployed capital, had donned in his perplexity. That is the impression the frequent weeps over “Unemployed capital” were expected and intended to convey.

But the most of us, rendered by a plenty of hard knocks insensible to this brand of hypnotizing, saw something very different. We saw the hunger, the unkemptness,

the scrawniness, the slow starvation, the quick suicide fall to the lot of the workers only. The unemployed capital simply put itself up on the pantry shelf and kept cool. It lost no weight, changed no color, and took none of its lives. It was ready at any time to step down off its shelf and resume where it left off, exploiting the workers.

In short, it was seen that capital, or the capitalist, at its worst, is no worse off than the worker at his best. The worst that could befall any capitalist by the most tremendous smash of his affairs would be that he would have to go to work. To the worker, going to work is not his worst, it is his most ideal state. Hence the reputed sufferings of Unemployed capital lost their effect on him—he was wiser.

“Unemployed capital” may have been unemployed; but he was not suffering thereby. The worker was, and is, actually suffering from the unemployment that afflicts him. A few more turns of the screw and he might rise in force to throw the millstone of capital off his neck. From being the under, he might become the upper dog. Hence the attempt of capital to trick itself out in the weeds of unemployment, in order to strike, for its own preservation, the chord of sympathy in its victim’s breast.

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