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EDITORIAL

THE FRESNO MYSTERY.

By DANIEL DE LEON

FRESNO, Calif., papers with date of the 10th of this month have reached this office giving fuller details than straggling despatches have hitherto of “the burning of the I.W.W. headquarters” by a mob, and other acts of violence committed upon the men in the camp. The information in the Fresno papers is now supplemented by a San Francisco correspondence, which appears in another column of this issue.¹ Nevertheless, there is some mystery about the affair. The “punishment does not fit the crime”; the effect does not square with the cause.

The action of the mob was an act of rage. It partook of the animus of a lynching bee. However reprehensible, illegal, criminal a lynching performance is, it has at its bottom some popular irritation, intense enough to blind, and to evoke mass immediate action. The simple fad of speaking at street corners can not be a provocative of such outbreaks of mass fury. It may provoke official wrong, police brutality—a mass outbreak never. The Fresno papers make no mention of any adequate provocative. Nor does the wild-eyed argument of “more ‘direct action’ and less ‘talking’,” reported by our to-day’s San Francisco correspondent as a feature of the orations of a leading Fresno “I.W.W.” speaker, fill the blank. Such ranting does not incense masses to immediate resentment; it is more likely to induce mass mirth. What, then, can have provoked the violent mass outbreak?

In the absence of more definite information one is left to the theory of probabilities. A starting point is furnished by the words “camp, and “tent,” used both in the Fresno papers and our correspondent’s letter.

I.W.W. “headquarters” that consist of a “tent and supplies,” whatever else they may be are no headquarters of the I.W.W. The I.W.W. is no lodging house proposition. It is a class-conscious organized working class proposition. The “camp

¹ [Not included here. To be appended.—R.B.]

and tent” proposition is suggestive of a gypsy encampment. What gypsy encampments are is well known—strolling centers of thievery, whither poultry and other “supplies,” occasionally moneys, not infrequently young girls also, surreptitiously gathered from the neighborhood, are secreted. The conclusions, arrived at from the starting point of “tent” and “supplies,” gather confirmation from specific utterances of the recognized leaders and organs of the tenting I.W.W. itself.

These organs have specifically advocated, preached, recommended theft. They have glorified the thing. They have given enthusiastic accounts of the procession of their members stealing chickens as they, the members, marched. Only most recently, their editor Hartwell S. Shippey coolly defended embezzlement. They have ridiculed as “aristocrats” and “freaks” those in the Labor Movement who spurn such methods as the slummery whence Anarchy proceeds, or whither it inevitably leads to. Nor have their leaders failed themselves to practice what they preached. The manifesto of James Wilson, their one-time editor, since mysteriously deceased, left embalmed in cold type how moneys, gathered for the “Spokane Free Speech Fight Martyrs,” were misappropriated while the dupes starved; and J.H. Walsh, their idolized originator of “raids on chicken coups {sic}” as a “revolutionary means,” now, after raiding the treasury of an Omaha Union, walks the highways of the West as a living illustration of theory practiced. Finally, they have clinched the point by themselves proudly proclaiming themselves “bums,” whence their name “I’m-a-bummery.”

The theory of probabilities affords some explanation to the Fresno Mystery. According to the theory, as stated in these columns two weeks ago, when the first stragglings news despatches arrived from Fresno, the Fresno incident justifies the conclusion that “I’m-a-bum rowdyism on a small scale has evoked rowdyism on a larger scale.

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