

EDITORIAL

THE VANITY OF SENTIMENT.

By DANIEL DE LEON

ALICE STONE BLACKWELL, a lady distinguished in the camp of “Votes for Women,” backs up her argument with the following incident in Massachusetts:

“An old farmer died leaving no will. His heirs were avaricious. They grudged the widow her right to the life use of one-third of his real estate, which was what the law at that time gave her. They hunted out a flaw in the marriage. She had always supposed that it was all right and regular, but they proved that the farmer had imposed upon her by an illegal ceremony. She was not legally his widow, and of course was not legally entitled to any share of his estate.”

There is a serious omission in this story—serious if the story is at all to have any practical and useful bearing upon the question of woman’s rights. The omission consists in all reference to the sex of the avaricious heirs of the old farmer. Was there no woman among them?

The point involved will appear from a passage in the address *Woman’s Suffrage*, issued by the Socialist Women of Greater New York in 1909. It is this:

“Answering on last April 27th a flippant fling against Woman Suffrage, made by the *New York Times*, in which, with its usual lack of information, the paper, after pronouncing Woman Suffrage a fad, stated that women now enjoy all the rights which they would enjoy if they voted, Harriette M. Johnston-Wood quoted a case decided only a few weeks before in the Supreme Court that completely and effectively refuted *The Times*. It was the case of an 18-year-old lad who was killed while at work, and on account of which the father brought an action for \$15,000 for damages. Before the case came up trial the father died, whereupon the case was continued by the widow and mother, who was left moreover, with six children to support. Based upon a law which provides that if an unmarried child dies the father, as next of kin, inherits all the property, and upon another law which provides that damages can be recovered only by the one who was

next of kin at the time of the death, and in case of the death of the next of kin, the action abates, the Court decided that the mother had no right of action, and awarded her \$50, that being the amount of the lad's wages from the time of his death to the death of his father. So far, this answer is Sense. It was a shot that ripped up *The Times's* false contention. Unfortunately, the effect of the shot is marred by just two short sentences—the sentences that the case 'should make a Suffragist and a revolutionist of every mother in the United States,' and 'What say the mothers?' This is Sentiment out of place.

“Sex is not class. Class is sexless. Class is amorphous in point of Sex. The iniquity perpetrated upon the mother of the slain working lad was not an iniquity perpetrated by one Sex upon another Sex; it was an iniquity perpetrated by one Class upon another Class. So long as there is one mother, whose class interests promote and are subserved by the enactment of such laws, and are promoted and subserved by their enforcement—just so long will the appeal to 'mothers' remain a responseless bit of sentimentalism, aye, harmful sentimentalism. On the one hand, as it dislocates the class solidarity of the proletariat by dividing into sexes, the appeal strikes a chord that can only twang a cracked note; on the other hand, the appeal leaves the bourgeois mother cool. If it at all sets her pulse beating higher, it is with satisfaction at not being herself a proletarian, exposed to such financial and heart-rending trials as was the mother of the slain lad—a satisfaction that will cause her to cling all the more fondly and tenaciously to capitalism and its laws, consequently also to the disfranchised state of mothers.”

If Alice Stone Blackwell will probe deeper the lady will probably discover that the iniquity perpetrated upon the widow of the deceased farmer was not an iniquity perpetrated by one Sex of heirs upon another Sex; she will probably discover it was perpetrated by one Class, consisting of both Sexes, upon another Class. The probe will enlighten the lady upon the class fact that so long as there is one widow, or woman, whose class interests promote and are subserved by such conduct as the “avaricious” heirs were guilty of—just so long will the appeal to woman remain responseless.

In short, the “Woman Question” is a branch of the trunk of the Class Question, and can not be solved in America by ignoring the trunk.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded November 2011

slpns@slp.org