

EDITORIAL

THE RAILROAD MOLOCH, I.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE speech delivered by Chauncey M. Depew on Railroad Day in Buffalo, on Sept. 28th, was reproduced in these columns with the introductory remark:

“The dull Depew did not himself understand the purport of the speech that his intellectual hod-carriers had thrown together for him.”

In successive articles commencing with this, these words will be made good.

Said Depew:

“One in every fifteen of the persons in the United States who are engaged in economical pursuits, or earning wages get their living from the operation of the railroads of the country.”

Few statements can be imagined more conclusively damaging to the social system of capitalism that Depew is an upholder of. It points out, calls attention to the possibility, it indicates the existence of a power of tyranny hardly matched in the annals of human history; the possibility and the existence of a power of tyranny both intense and far reaching. One need go no further than the figures given—1 to 15—, it becomes evident that, if one single industry, together with its tributary branches, has such a large percentage of wage earners in its service, the army of workingmen and dependents on these that depend for existence on such a concern must be enormous; and that, consequently, the power of such a concern is not in keeping with the canons of either civilization or freedom. Clear it must be that a concern (managed, of course, by a few directors), from whose will or whim hang the lives of such a large aggregation of human beings, can dictate policies, raise or throw down parties, carry Presidents, Courts, Legislatures, Governors, Mayors, etc., in their pockets, run the country, in short, to suit itself. Clear is it that under such circumstances the suffrage is a farce, “political freedom” a term for lip-service only.

Nor is this a theory that practice overthrows or modifies.

Andrew Kling, a resident of South Norwalk, Ct., a railroad employee, was placed last year as one of the candidates for office on the platform and ticket of the Connecticut Socialist Labor Party. No sooner was this known to his official superiors than Kling was “hailed up.” Socialism did not suit the Railroad Company. The suffrage was to be indulged in by its employees only in case they used it in its own behalf; and the conception of an employee presuming to accept a candidacy, which implied his readiness to overthrow the rule of his masters, was as repulsive to his masters as the notion of a serf of the glebe to dream of ending the rule of squirarchy may be imagined to have been repulsive to the Squire. It was treated in the one case, as it would have been treated in the other.

Depew’s admission was crushing to himself. His railroad stock-holding audience probably did not read in his words, any more than he himself, the doom that they imply. Political tyranny can never last. Least of all can the economic-political tyranny of capitalism, symbolized in the railroad industry. Even tho’ the “vis inertiae” of man might induce him to submit to political servitude, the basis of that servitude, to wit, economic conditions, will lash him on to freedom. The increasing economic dependence of increasing numbers, acting and reacting upon the individual slave, is bound to reach a point when the most stolid will pull themselves together, and throw off the galling yoke.

It is not alone by relentlessly carrying on the concentrative and grinding laws of capitalism that the capitalist class acts as the handmaid of Socialism in furnishing the conditions that render popular freedom possible and inevitable; the capitalist class also gives a helping hand to Socialism by producing the witless Depews that gather, and furnish Socialism with the ammunition necessary to blow up the capitalist system.

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