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EDITORIAL

AT THE BIER OF CHIEF ARTHUR.

By DANIEL DE LEON

PETER McArthur, or as he came to be known, P.M. McArthur, Grand Chief of the Order of Locomotive Engineers, was the most perfect type of the old style idea of Unionism, or Pure and Simple Trades Unionism, as the thing is now generally styled. Many circumstances contributed thereto, chief among which was the trade that he presided over.

Differently from Gompers' trade, cigarmaking, the locomotive engineer's trade does not cater to a luxury and a vice: it is a useful service, hard to distinguish from production. Differently from Mitchell's trade, coal mining, locomotive engineer's activity, while no more important to life than the coal miner's, is not circumscribed to certain localities: it extends throughout the country, ramifies itself like the veins and arteries of the body from the most vital to the least important extremities. Differently, from all other trades, the locomotive engineer's is that one that grows out of and in turn develops that complexity of life that consists in subdivision of labor as a prerequisite for vast production: it is the trade that, through transportation, at one and the same time makes co-operation possible between distant parts and thus typifies future society. Such a trade is pivotal; it holds a strategic position. Society lay, it still lies, but decreasingly so, at the mercy of the locomotive engineer. Accordingly, the locomotive engineer was and yet is vested with a matchless power for his own aggrandizement, or for the emancipation of his fellow wage earners, wage slaves of all trades. Did he, is he doing either? No. Why not? Thanks to the mold of Pure and Simple Trades Unionism in which his mind was educated.

Pure and Simple Trades Unionism concealed from him the fact that, not the railroad owners and stockholders, but he was the producer; it concealed from him, accordingly, the fact that he was a fleeced being, consequently the brother of all

other wage slaves. With that error as the corner stone, the rest of the superstructure followed. The locomotive engineer was lured with the belief that things would improve for him. The law of capitalism, by which inventions throw out skill and workers, was kept from him, and thus he was allowed to follow only the “ignis fatuus” of future comfort along capitalist lines, while the beacon light of Socialism—that would have taught him that along capitalist lines his future was dark, whereas emancipation lay within reach of his hand by the overthrow of capitalism—was cut off by thick pure and simple blinkers clapped to his eyes. To make a long story short, the engineers missed their own aggrandizement, and have so far abstained from taking the first step towards redeeming their class: they have transported soldiers, sent out to shoot their own (the engineers’) brother wage slaves of other trades in all parts of the country. The reward that they received for thus identifying themselves with their fleecers is to now find the ground weakening under them. The wages they receive are comparatively trifling, and the electric motor is stealthily joining concentration so that the day is in sight when the engineer’s skill will be superfluous and he will have to join the large and increasing army of unskilled labor. In other words his one time impregnable strategic position is being slowly and steadily scaled. The ladder by which the foe, the capitalist class, is climbing is Pure and Simple Trades Unionism—and P.M. McArthur has, in the ignorance of his own training, held and helped to hold that ladder for the scalers.

It does look as if also that dictum of Marx will prove true that, not until all the several elements, needed to carry out the Social Revolution, are thrown flat along side one another, not until they all shall have realized the identity of their class interests, and that the salvation of none can be accomplished unless they all pull together;—not until then will the hour of human emancipation have sounded.

Looked at in that light P.M. McArthur has been a force that made for progress: he shortened by fully a generation the day when the locomotive engineer will be lying flat along side of the hod-carrier and the street motorman—each helpless in himself, all-powerful together.

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