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EDITORIAL

CAN THAT BE SHE?

By DANIEL DE LEON

FOR many a year, economic sceptics have been in search of a “poor, good, old widow,” who, in rain and sunshine was trotted out by certain Professors of Political Economy as an illustration of the wrong that would be wrought by Socialism. The good old lady would be paraded as a “poor, good, old widow, whose only income in her semi-helplessness flowed from a tenement-house.” The distressful picture being drawn, the said Professors would step back a step or two, and looking sympathetically at the vacant space before them, where the “poor, good, old widow” was supposed to stand on exhibition, they would wave their right hand at the vacancy and cry out: “And her they would expropriate!”

Students of fact and science were seized with a deep interest in the “poor, good, old widow.” It struck them that a “poor, good, old widow,” who was so poor in her old age as to be left dependent upon a tenement-house, and thus forced to eke an existence out of a death-dealing barrack called a tenement, would be a mighty good specimen by which rather to illustrate how capitalist society first victimizes the masses and then de-humanizes them. Students of fact and science started, accordingly, in search of the dear old soul. They were bent upon making her personal acquaintance, ascertain from her the process of reasoning by which she had been made to testify against her own interests, and, if possible, secure her as a witness for the prosecution in the criminal proceedings entitled *The People vs. the Capitalist Class*. But their efforts were all in vain. The “good, poor, old, widow” eluded all search. The evil minded even began to whisper that she might be a re-incarnation of Prof. Saray Gamp’s “Mrs. Harris.” It now, however, looks as if the “poor, old widow” has been found, though only at her death.

Maria Kull, seventy-three years old and thirty years a widow, was taken last Monday to the hospital to die. She was taken away by the Police, almost by force.

The “poor, old widow” seemed to have a peculiar attachment for the dingy little room in which she lived and into which no one was allowed to enter except her tenants to pay their rent, and that only on the first of each month. The woman’s shrieks stayed the hands of the Health Department, which was about to make a bon-fire of the filthy appurtenances, including the couch, of the “poor, old widow.” One word and another dropped by her in the delirium of death, caused the couch to be looked into. The “poor, old widow’s” attachment to her couch was then understood. In the filling of the couch were concealed two deeds proving that the poor old soul owned two double-decker tenements, besides \$20,000 deposited in the Germania and Dry Dock Savings Banks. Nor yet was this all. Wrapped up in layers upon layers of dirty paper were found rolls of \$2,000, \$3,000 and \$1,000 in cash. The inventory does not mention any letters from savings banks directors with advance proofs of their essays on “The Large Deposits in Savings Banks, an Evidence of Prosperity among the Working Class.” But the anxiety of the Police to get through with the job and out of the pest-hole may account for their neglect in noticing these letters.

The question now is, Is Mrs. Kull the “poor, good old widow” enthused over and shielded by the said Professors of Political Economy, and so anxiously looked for by students of facts and science? can she be her?

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

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