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EDITORIAL

“SACREDNESS OF PROPERTY”.

By DANIEL DE LEON

A STORY that comes from Pittsburg, Pa., reads like a passage from David Buchanan’s account of the doings of the Duchess of Sutherland, when, with armed force, she drove the peasants from the land in order to clear “her” estate for a then up to date capitalist sheep-walk. Mrs. Sarah Lot, a widow, was on the 18th instant unceremoniously put upon the street, together with all her havings, by the Jones & Laughlin Company of Pittsburg. It was not an instance of dispossession for non-payment of rent. The woman owns the premises, and had lived on them since her marriage for over fifty years. Nor did the dispossessors question her title. The Jones & Laughlin Company offered the woman \$2,000, then \$4,000 for the home. She declined the price. She was not holding out for speculative purposes. She wished to live the rest of her days in the house that she had inhabited as her property for nearly two generations. Mrs. Lot’s sentiment stood in the way of the Company’s interests, which claimed to need the place in order to complete its \$20,000,000 addition to its plant—a regular Duchess of Sutherland “clearing of estate” affair. The Jones & Laughlin Company simply stopped negotiations, and took forcible possession. It demolished the home, and threw the woman’s goods on the street beside the debris. Being asked what they meant to do in the matter, the children of Mrs. Lot, whom such treatment has brought near death’s door, said: “If she brings a suit for damages, its course will be tedious, and she probably will have died long before it is settled. We have no money with which to fight the Company and had to allow them to do as they pleased.” Being asked upon the matter, William Lorimer Jones, the manager who is in charge of the improvements, answered laconically, “I guess we know what we are doing.”

Instances like this tear the veil from the myth regarding the “sacredness of property,” that capitalism ever invokes. The “sacredness of property” applies only to

the property that the capitalist has brought within his clutches. Nothing held by others—whether life, limb, property or honor—is sacred to the capitalist. Capitalism began its career with rapine, just like the rapine now perpetrated upon the widow Sarah Lot. Banked upon passed {past?} crime, capitalism raises the usurpation, that it has thus acquired, to the dignity of a “sacred right.” But every little while the sacredness gets a rent. Crime breeds criminal needs. The original crime is, accordingly, periodically repeated, as in such instances as that of the widow Lot, and then the “sacredness” stands exposed. Capitalism, to-day, is the sum of all villainy. In the days of the Duchess of Sutherland it at least had the redeeming feature of boldness. It was the fist that created the propertiless, on the one side, and the capitalist, on the other. To-day, capitalism carries the additional stamp of cowardice and hypocrisy. It hides behind the mask of “sacredness” to protect its past plunder, and then it crawls behind the petticoat of the “Law’s” delays to prevent its violation of “sacredness” from being punished. In the days of the Duchess of Sutherland, capitalism could at least lay claim to the virtue of being the scourge with which Social Evolution was driving man to that point of co-operative labor, from which common affluence could flow. To-day capitalism is the Old Man of the Sea that weighs heavy upon co-operative labor, and deprives it of its fruit—the wellbeing of all.

There is nothing sacred to-day except the Movement to shake off the villainous capitalist system from the back of humanity.

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

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