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EDITORIAL

A VOICE FROM SAN FRANCISCO.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE first letter from a San Francisco comrade, caught in San Francisco by the recent calamity, reached this office yesterday and is published in this issue.¹ It is published with the fervent hope that other letters may now be on the way from other comrades, long esteemed in the Party for their heart, their character and their knowledge, but of whose whereabouts nothing has been known since the fateful 18th.

To-day's letter is descriptive in the full sense of the term. It describes the physical picture, and also describes the moral and sociological aspect of the wilderness that only recently was a bustling city.

Owls of wisdom and philosophy, but experts in the cynicism needed to palliate the sins of capitalism, jeer at the "moral" that is being pointed out. No doubt much of this moral is spineless. And yet the "moral" talks loudly.

The earthquake itself may be put in the catalogue of "visitations" that man can not foresee, least of all guard against. To the extent that wealth and life was lost thereby, there is nothing to do but bow in humble resignation before a force that man can not control. But the wealth destroyed and the lives taken by the earthquake itself is but a small percentage of the damage done. The overwhelming majority of the wealth destroyed, of the lives lost, of the anguish suffered in San Francisco was caused not by the earthquake. The earthquake played only a remote part in that—the immediate cause was the vices of the capitalist class. It is fire that devastated San Francisco. True, the earthquake broke the water mains and crippled the power to fight the conflagration. But what was the real and immediate source of the conflagration? What fed it? The large number of rickety and even frame houses

¹ [To be appended at a later date. The correspondent was Olive M. Johnson, then a resident of Fruitvale, across the bay from San Francisco.—R.B.]

that should long ago have been torn down, and made place for fire-proof buildings. But no, so long as there is a penny's profit to be drawn from his old investment, the capitalist will keep the old thing in existence. That fact explains the continuance of horsecars in New York in these days of electricity, it explains the continuance of antiquated machinery where improved machinery should be at work; it explains the "imprisonment" of great inventions, which are not allowed to be put in operation lest they interfere with older methods from which profit can still be extracted—it explains the continuance in San Francisco of frame houses, a perpetual threat to the city's safety. That in these frame-houses only workingmen were huddled only underscores the "original sin" so to speak; this latter circumstance is only one of the incidental manifestations of which the brutal riding over a child by a fleeing capitalist in his automobile is another.

Capitalism to-day only holds civilization back. Wellbeing, human safety and happiness—the only goal of civilization—these are not promoted to-day, they are hampered, where they are not hamstrung, by capitalism. Such a social system necessarily breeds inhumanity. What with its "economics" and its "ethics", capitalism perpetually exposes society to such physical and moral catastrophes as our San Francisco correspondent depicts.

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

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