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EDITORIAL

A GREAT NATIONAL COLLEGE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

A morning paper yesterday reported a street fight in front of the City Hall between two newsboys, and its sudden dispersion by Magistrate Leroy B. Crane, who accidentally happened to pass that way. The report closes with the paragraph:

“Say,” asked one of the disappointed spectators as the Magistrate resumed his walk along the park, “who was der fresh guy dat gummed de game?”

The paper we quote from evidently considers the report a bit of clever journalism. And so it is; but in a sense very different from the one it means. The short report, together with its closing paragraph, is a choice cameo. It tells in a condensed form a tale from which those who have eyes to see, can read the nation’s decline, and one of the school in which its decline is being trained.

What matters it if a nation can point to citizens and scholars able to dissect the root of the Greek verb, to measure and weigh a star, to explain a disinterred fossil, or to hold their own in the ways of politeness and elegance? These are not facts enough from which to draw conclusions. It is essential to know whether or not, at the other end of the ladder, ignorance and vulgarity are on the increase or decrease. If these are on the decrease, then the nation is rising; if however these are on the increase then the chasm between the two extremes is deepening and broadening, then the nation is on the decline. This is true everywhere: in a republic, the truth is heavily underscored.

The language of the newsboy quoted above is the language that tells of base associations, of ignorance, of vulgarity, of a horizon that is narrow, of a spirit that is stunted. It is a language that reaches the ear in our cities, aye, in our villages, with increasing frequency, and with a frequency infinitely greater than that with which the eye is treated to the record of our scholars and gentlemen. The horizon of the adult masses of to-morrow is being narrowed: their speech, that great test of mental

culture, is being brutalized. And how else could it be?

While armories are going up like mushrooms, schools decline, actually decline in percentage; and as if that were not evil enough, the declining wage of the parents keep an increasing percentage of the children from availing themselves of what school opportunity there may be. Moreover, this increasing poverty, that keeps children from schools, huddles their families into such narrow quarters that the street becomes the child's playground. Thus, acting and reacting upon each other, these conditions force the child to grub, to push for a living; the street becomes his school, and cleverness becomes the capacity to "beat" others. Printing House Square is a national college where the young are being tutored in the jargon of foulness, depravity and vulgarity, and in the habits of the bagnio.

Such is the orchestration to which our Nation is "marching towards its manifest destiny," and pulpit and the press look on and sing the praises of our civilization!

Yet, there is hope. The movement is growing, reared from the lap of the lowly, that is destined to marshal the forces of society to the extirpation of the system that can thus work the degradation of the people, and undermine the foundations of the republic. That movement—the Socialist Labor Party—will ere long be strong enough to step in, as Magistrate Crane did, and "gum de game" of the buccaneer class that to-day is leading the Nation deeper and deeper down into Slumdom.

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

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