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EDITORIAL

POOR SIR CHRISTOPHERS!

By DANIEL DE LEON

SIR CHRISTOPHER FURNESS, head of the shipbuilding firm of Furness, Withy & Co., being in incessant friction with his employes, held a conference with their representatives in Hartlepool, Eng., and there made to them certain proposals. The gist of the proposals is that “if the trades unions thought they could carry on the business themselves, the firm was willing to sell out to them; if not, strikes must cease, or the works would be closed.” Sir Christopher’s address embodying the proposal is announced from London as “a lucid and able defence of the capitalist, and an attack on Socialism.”

Fact is, Sir Christopher’s position is a lucid proof that the Socialist tide is rearing up to the capitalist’s nose; that the latter finds himself compelled to abandon his old-time hypocritical pretences of brotherly relations with Labor; and that he is now driven to bay—just as Socialism has all along maintained he would be.

The union, such as the thing is understood and has been nursed by the Sir Christophers, was founded on the theory that Labor was the peer of Capital, and the two could dicker, chaffer and log-roll just the same as capitalists do among one another. Socialism pronounced the notion chimerical. He who says “capitalist” implies, if he knows what he is talking about, the obverse, “wage-slave.” The moment there is a “capitalist” there must be “wage-slaves.” The term “capitalist” implies the existence of a master class, and the parallel existence of a subject, dependent, fleeced and tyrannized slave class. Without the latter there is no capitalist possible.

The unions, promoted by Sir Christopher, ignored all this. Socialism predicted they would find out. The old union theory was not a workable proposition—at least not durably. The error of the starting point has been ground into fine powder

between the upper and the nether millstone of fact. The chimera having been ground to dust, the naked facts now face each other. The Sir Christophers can no longer “deal” with their quondam and alleged brothers: the Sir Christophers now discover that one or the other “brother” must own and run the plant: the two alleged brothers can not do it together: they are not partners: never were: one or the other must down—just as Socialism has been all along predicting.

Arrived at this point, the Sir Christophers amend their former position materially. They demand the alternative of dumb submission, or that they be bought out. The belief in this is a pardonable, and lingering illusion. The unions have all the while been learning apace. They will eventually, if not sooner, reject both alternatives. As to dumb submission, 'tis now too late to preach that; as to paying the Sir Christophers for plants that the Sir Christophers never produced but plundered from Labor, the union is not likely to acquiesce in that either. The union already has struck out on the right path—independent Labor politics, as all along predicted by Socialism that the union would do. Once on that path, the rest will go like rolling off a log. The union will unify the working class on the political as well as the industrial field, mop the earth with the Sir Christophers, and submit to these the alternative—either work or get off the earth.

Poor Sir Christophers, with their “lucid and able defences of the capitalist and attacks on Socialism”!

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

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