

# The People.

VOL. V, NO. 31

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 27, 1895

PRICE 3 CENTS

FIRST EDITORIAL

## Barking Up the Wrong Tree

By DANIEL DE LEON

**T**he woman delegates to the Purity Congress that met two weeks ago in Baltimore, learned, it is to be hoped, an important lesson. They are up in arms against prostitution. "The Traffic in Girls" and other such topics were discussed by them. But lecturing of this sort did not satisfy them; they thought it advisable to extend the field of their "purifying" work. It was not enough to lecture one another on the sinfulness of impurity, they justly argued; it was of more importance to carry the Gospel into the haunts of impurity and endeavor to redeem the fallen. So thought, so done. At about midnight on the 15th a party of them, headed by Mrs. Edholm, and escorted by two ministers and four newspapermen, beside two police sergeants, dived into the slums and visited the most notorious houses of prostitution. There, in the presence of the fallen and surrounded by the protecting parsons, newspaper men and police sergeants, they prayed and expostulated. For a while the women listened patiently, suddenly a Black Crook sort of transformation took place. The accusers and their backers were thrust into the place of the accused; the accused stepped into the role of the accusers. A young girl, not over sixteen years old, turned upon the "social purity" preachers, looking down upon them with enraged and lofty dignity, and sweeping in her denunciation the parsons, the newspaper men and the sergeants, charged them with producing the impurity they were complaining about: "Starvation wages," she thunderingly proclaimed. "Is what drives us to such houses."

The "social purity" women had been barking up the wrong tree. The capitalist class which they uphold and to which they belong, together with its intellectual prostitutes of capitalist parsons and quill-drivers, and the capitalist plug-uglies styled policemen are the cause of existing impurity. The one sets it rolling, the others prop it up with sermons, editorials and clubs.

Did the "social purity" women learn a lesson? If, indeed, their "purity" is stronger than their class interests, they will turn around, preach to those unprincipled newspaper men and parsons who are bolstering up the impurity-producing social order and carry their campaign of fumigation higher—into the palatial mansions of the capitalist

exploiters. If they do not, they simply put the fact bare that they are the lineal descendants of that generation of vipers whom the Nazarene lashed with the words:

“Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

“Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.”

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

Uploaded February 23, 2003