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The Gamblers' Hoodoo

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Any one who has had occasion to watch the childish superstitions of gamblers, whether in the gambling resorts along the Rhine, or in New Orleans, or on the Texas frontier of Mexico, cannot fail to be struck by the resemblance between the antics of our "business men," at this season particularly, and those of gamblers at all seasons, especially when they are losing.

The gambler is a superstitious being. His deity is Hazard, and he imagines he can conjure her. If he sits with his right leg in a certain posture, or if a squinting visitor passes before him, or if his money drops tail or head upward, or if the seam of his handkerchief is right side or wrong side in view,—these and so many other trivialities, portend ill or good luck to him, and by seeking to control them he fancies he can control fortune's wheel. The more adverse his luck, the more credulously the gambler sticks to his superstitions. The gambler's hoodoo is proverbial.

Just so with our "business men!" Theirs is not strictly speaking a game of chance. But in view of the fact that an infinite mass of information is requisite on the condition of the market to guide the "business man," in view of the fact that it is impossible for any one mind to grasp all the needed points, and above all, in view of the sublime ignorance of "business men" touching the nature of the social system in which they squirm, "business" is virtually a game of chance, and the "business man" is to all intents and purposes a gambler. At this season, just after election, when the long heralded "Advance Agent of Prosperity" has won the day, that gambler's feature, which consists in a childish devotion to superstition, has become manifest in our "business man!"

Prosperity has been absent for years and years. It had been going further and further off, and quite recently it took a spurt and leaped back a good deal further. That this is an inevitable result of the development of capitalism the "business man" is blissfully ignorant of. He does not realize that capitalist concentration displaces labor and thereby starves out the market. He sees an ever large store of wealth, and, of course, if

purchasers don't come, he attributes their absence to "bad luck." Of late he has been quite accustomed to reverses, but suddenly hope dawned. The campaign broke in upon him; for months his blockhead papers have been dinning it into his ears that the election of McKinley was a sure conjurer of prosperity; open-mouthed he has during these months been drinking in the slop-jarfulls of brilliant promises made by his lunkhead politicians, from Bourke Cockran down to Depew and Harrison. The "Advance Agent" won. "Now," reasons the business man, "Prosperity MUST follow." Accordingly he has began to bustle. Commercial travellers are looking chipper. Shopkeepers polished up their shop brass knobs, dusted their counters, put on a clean collar, and waited for the big flood of customers. With McKinley as a gambler's hoodoo, they are now all expectant, confidently expectant.

But the flood of customers will stay away, the others will fall far below expectations. All well imagine a hoodoo to keep the winter away, as one to keep off the winter of capitalist misery. Capitalist misery cannot be hoodooed, it can only be choked off by choking capitalism to death.

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

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