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THIRD EDITORIAL

LABOR AS A PAWN.

By DANIEL DE LEON

After all, it now looks likely that Parliament will be dissolved, and an “appeal taken to the country” by the Tory Government on its South African War policy. The symptoms that denote this move are interesting to us in America, inasmuch as they are political manœuvres that savor strongly of the manœuvres that are favorite with our own American capitalists in their labor deceiving tactics.

There is in England a Workmen’s Compensating law. This law is ostensibly intended to compensate workingmen for injuries sustained. In England, as here, where the working class is not class-consciously represented, such laws are virtually dead letters. How dead a letter this particular law is may be judged from the apathy displayed by the insurance companies to insure risks under the law. Dead, however, as the law is, bills to extend the law to agricultural laborers have been favorite measures with the Members of Parliament who have agricultural constituencies. Accordingly, such bills have periodically been introduced from such sources. Of course, the bills never had a chance, but the mere fact of introducing them was considered a sufficient “record” on which to stand for re-election, and to bait the candidate’s vote-catching hook with. Such a bill has been on the files of this Parliament also, and no amount of struggle, or parliamentary tactics, to move it to a second reading has been of any avail. Suddenly the bill is boosted forward {forward?}, and the thing is done by a Government whip!

Is this a change of heart?

It is no change of heart. Even if the bill be passed, the capitalist{s} would not suffer, seeing that they are not troubled by the original Act. What the move means is that the Tory Government, whose strongholds are mainly in the agricultural regions, proposes to bestow upon itself the popularity that “friendship” for such bills are expected to earn for their promoters ’round election time. It means that the

Tory Government contemplates a dissolution and wants to make assurance of returning to power doubly sure. The bandits, whom the Joe Chamberlain Government has been hiring to hurrah for the war and the Government, to break up public anti-war meetings, and otherwise terrorize the people into an approval of the barbarous conduct of the British Government in its South African policy,—these bandits and their work may not be reducible to votes. They may help; but the goodwill of the agriculturists, considered dumb enough to be captivated with sawdust legislation, is considered more reliable.

Wherever the suffrage exists, the capitalist class has its rear and flanks exposed. It is so felt, and thoroughly felt, here in America, where manhood suffrage prevails and elections are of frequent recurrence: hence the numerous devices adopted here to keep the working class in the ignorance of class-unconsciousness, and then wheedling their votes out of their horny hands. What a power the ballot would be in class-conscious workingmen's hands, and how great the danger to the idle capitalist class from that quarter, may be gauged by this present manoeuvre in a country, where, despite all theories to the contrary, the wage-earning class is to a large extent disfranchised.

Class-unconscious labor is but a pawn on the political chess-board of capitalism.

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

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