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FIRST EDITORIAL

THE ASSASSINATION OF HUMBERT.

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The New York papers assume that Humbert was killed by a malcontent workingman, who was “an anarchist and a revolutionist.” The meagre details given out do not allow of any definite conclusion. The king may have been shot down in a general melee or he may have fallen by the bullet of one of the madmen produced by the recent bread riots.



King Humbert I of Italy was assassinated on July 29, 1900. The man who “struck the stupid blow,” as De Leon called it, proved to be an Italian-American anarchist named Gaetano Bresci.

The Crispi government, sustained by King Humbert, really prepared the way for the murder.¹ When riots on both the Peninsula and Sicily commenced, the Italian government repressed the uprising with ferocity. There was a lack of food, and the people, maddened by the fact that there was plenty in sight, but none for them, arose and struck blindly at their enemies. Everything was against them. The soldiers, police, deputies, and courts, all took part in the slaughter of the workingmen and subjected them anew to the conditions which had produced the famine in the first place.

A murder of necessity causes a shock to all people. Yet those who have followed events in Italy for the last two years could not but see that attempts on the life of the king were inevitable. He was the head and front of the oppression of a great class.

It is senseless to speak him free and throw the blame on the “government”—If the “government,” outside of himself, did the wrong, he was willing to profit by their misdeeds.

The Socialist deputies have raised up their voice in warning time and again,

but their warnings were taken as threats, parliament was dissolved by Humbert's own orders, and the deputies were cast into prison. If there is blame to be fixed on anyone, we must trace the Italian troubles through all their windings.

Who is the Italian government which wrought the people to the pitch of blind insanity? The working class? No. The Italian government is the capitalist class, the same as the government of this country is the capitalist class. In India we have the spectacle of millions dying from want, because those millions have been deprived of the product of their labor. We find in the wheat belt of Russia a similar state of affairs. We also see here that evidences are multiplying that we, too, have the identical problem to face. In every instance the means used to lighten the already heavy burden have increased it and made it more galling. Every act of capitalist society proves its incompetence. Every new item in its history is another argument for us to end forever its rule.

No workingman, surely no intelligent workingman, surest of all, no product of Socialist agitation, struck the stupid blow. The murderer is a legitimate product of capitalist "philosophy," of that "philosophy" that denies the class struggle. The striking down of Humbert is not a blow at the capitalist system, because one man, a score, a thousand men are not the cause of the prevalent misery. The work can be done only by taking into our own hands the powers of government and using them for our own, the working class', advantage, the same as the ruling class use them today for their advantage.

The cause of the emancipation of the working class has gained no ground by this murder. While it was no more horrible to fall by a pistol shot than to be mangled in a machine, the fact remains that an excuse is given to throw back the real and telling work of political agitation.

The capitalist class cared no more for Humbert than did the man who shot him, but dead he will probably become an excellent pretext for further outrages and oppressions in Italy.

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

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¹ [Francesco Crispi (1819–1901), twice premier of Italy (1887–91 and 1893–96), was a notorious reactionary whose domestic and foreign policies, including an unsuccessful war against Ethiopia, received unstinting support from King Humbert I.]