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EDITORIAL

THE RIGHT OF SELF-DEFENSE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

The working class, excepting where it strikes through the **Socialist Labor Party**, has practically abrogated the right of self-defense. The police, the courts, and the other forces of government, have been directly instrumental in depriving the working class of the right to defend itself, and in encouraging it in the belief that it has not that right.

There was no protest in the South when the franchise was taken away from thousands of voters. The government is the concern of every man, and yet the only way in which the men can control government has been shut off. It was a crime of unusual magnitude. The effects will be apparent whenever and wherever the disfranchised citizens appear in the courts for redress. All their force has been rendered nugatory. They are powerless to right themselves, or to make themselves felt. Their privileges have become null and void, and they are no more than the voteless Indians' are. While they have no agent to fleece them directly, they also have no standing in the community that is as good as the standing of the Indian. For this reason, they will be at the mercy of all, and will be the legitimate prey for any adventurer who happens along.

The Indian, deprived of all attributes and functions of citizenship, still has the might of the hatchet. The newly made batch of Indians has not even that. They have only the blind, useless power of mad reprisal, and even that falls through because they are hemmed in on all sides, and were rendered impotent before the last rag of manhood was torn from them.

Before the militant part of the government, the working class counts for nothing. The police force does not look to that class for its appointment, and it therefore does not look to it for its maintenance and continuation. The policeman, in most cases, looks upon the members of the working class, despite the fact that he is of that class, as natural enemies, who are wrong in all and under all circumstances, and who must be treated as wrong in all cases. He uses this power

to the utmost, because the working class here, though not deprived of its ballot, has not the right of self-defense. In the recent clubbing affair in this city the young man who was so unmercifully beaten was bulldozed out of all opportunity to make good his claim to consideration. He was simply railroaded aside as one worthy of no consideration. The heads of the departments understood that, as a workingman, he could not defend himself, and so, with additional insults and jeers, they dismissed him. He dared not defend himself.

In the matter of economic rights, the working class is supposed also to be without the right of defense. If it attempts to ward off the fakirs who sap it, if it attempts to throw aside the trades union leeches, all the powers of the capitalist press, all the courts, all the police, and all the employers instantly rise in arms and attempt to hold them in their former position of abject servility and willingness to be used. We have only to point to the cases in which the members of the working class have been driven into the pure and simple unions, the cases where our men have been victimized for affiliating with the party, and cases where they have been ordered to discontinue their locals of the **Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance** and join those of the **American Federation of Labor**. Where was our right to defend ourselves? Wherein could we strike back and assert ourselves as citizens and as men? We had been denied the right to choose. We have been deprived of the liberty to shape our own course. We have been denied the right of self-defense at every turn

In every strike that necessitated an appeal to the courts, in every complication between capitalists and workingmen, the court has assumed that, of necessity, the workingman must be in the wrong. What chance is there to make good his boast of free Americanism, when he is the most foreign thing possible when the question of his rights comes up? In every test of labor laws the point is made that class legislation is contrary to the constitution. Yet, all legislation is class legislation. It is impossible to pass a law that is not so, while sharply defined, and antagonistic classes exist. The statute books groan under the load of laws, and all of them favor one class or the other. When they favor the working class, a judge's pencil is drawn through them. In the courts, the working class has not the right of self-defense.

An employer may discharge a man, and there can be no protest. The man may have produced much wealth, his skill may have been in a large measure responsible for the success of the business, but when the employer wishes to discharge him he has the privilege to do so. In the workshop, as elsewhere, the working class has not

the right of self-defense.

The whole of our present social life is built from this basis. As we sell ourselves for a wage, as we place ourselves upon the sufferance of the class enemy, we deprive ourselves of every resource, and give into other hands the right to govern, to interpret and to judge. Wherever we touch we find that it is literally true that the mightiest class, the producer of all wealth, the greatest numerically, and the greatest intellectually has not the right of self-defense.

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

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