

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 2, NO. 167.

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, DECEMBER 14, 1901.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

TELL-TALE CARNEGIE GIFT.

By DANIEL DE LEON

NUMEROUS occurrences in recent years have been pointed out as bearing strong resemblance to the symptoms that have attended former great social upheavals. The incidents were striking; and they justly caused the careful observer of modern events to pause and wonder, his heart and mind seized with uneasy forebodings. The late \$10,000,000 gift of Andrew Carnegie to the United States takes easy front rank among these ominous historic symptoms.

The Carnegie gift was not in cash. What he gave was bonds of the United States Steel Corporation to the par value of the amount. It was an endowment, with the proceeds of which a national educational establishment was to be raised and sustained. What does this mean? The as yet not fully understood new language, in which modern history is now uttering itself, will become intelligible when translated back into the old and known language, through which at a certain great social epoch, now thoroughly understood, history made its utterings. That social epoch covered the decline and fall of the Roman empire.

During the period when the Roman Empire was plunging towards perdition, the Roman emperors became universal heirs. Whosoever had any relatives, whom he wished to secure in the possession of some part of his property, made sure to designate the emperor as a "co-heir." These bequests to the emperors were far from being a voluntary act; least of all was it an act denoting "love and affection" for the imperial legatee. Just the reverse. It was an act denoting dread and fear. By giving something to the emperor, aye, the bulk of the property, it was expected to enlist his interest and influence in securing the testator's natural heirs against the rapacity of the gubernatorial vultures, who, from the emperor down, would otherwise plunder the heirs, leaving them nothing, perchance not even their lives. Translating the present still inarticulate mutterings of the Carnegie gift into the articulate

language of these old testators, the former becomes intelligible.

Though economics are the pivot on which politics revolve, nevertheless politics are the force that keeps economics in place. Without having the Government on its side capitalism could not stand one day. What is said of capitalism in general holds proportionately true of each individual capitalist concern. In the measure in which such concerns assume giant stature, reach the truly capitalist stage, they lean heavier upon Government. The United States Steel Corporation is in this predicament. Without the good will of the Government it would crumble. Already there is talk of a rival rearing its billion head, and for months the stock quotations have betrayed mistrust on the part of speculators and investors in United States Steel. The privately stuffing of the pockets of individual members of the Government with Carnegie Steel stock would not stand. That manoeuvre is adequate enough at lower stages: when a capitalist concern stands out as an international concern the old manoeuvre becomes ineffective. The interest of something less shifting is needed than the individuals that constitute the Government. The Government itself must be grappled. The Carnegie “magnanimous” gift of \$10,000,000 in BONDS was intended to turn the United States Government into a partner of Carnegie’s, and thus secure for his concern the full support of the machinery of Government. In order to safeguard the bonds given to it and the proceeds thereon, the United States Government would so have to demean itself as to safeguard the bonds that Carnegie retains in his own pockets,—similarly as did the Roman emperors, designated as co-heirs.

Somewhere, commenting on the air of flattered virtue put on by an infamous Roman emperor, who was notified of his having been designated co-heir by a distinguished patrician, Tacitus observes that none but a bad emperor could be chosen co-heir of his children by a good father. What an infamous social system must not that be that rears a Government fit to be chosen as partner by a rampant social brigand!

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

Uploaded August 2006