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EDITORIAL

TWO PICTURES.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE picture presented in a recent comic magazine is a clever one, and touching, withal. On one side of the street a dray-horse, braced against the icy blast, his head lowered to the storm, stands, without a blanket, in the shafts of a heavy wagon—just stands, without even the exertion of dragging his load to keep him warm. Across, at the opposite curb, rests an automobile, an expensive limousine; over its front a heavy bearskin robe has been tossed to ward off the weather. A heavy, numbing snow descends over both. “I’d have a fur cloak too, if I cost \$5,000!” says the horse.

Another picture unrolls before the mind’s eye. On one side stand 20,000 unemployed, destitute workingmen in New York city alone; 20,000 in Chicago; 10,000 in Cleveland; 5,000 in Denver; 12,000 in San Francisco; thousands more in every industrial center of the land. Without food, without clothing, without shoes, without gloves they face the bitter winds of winter, in a vain hunt for “something to do.” Even the capitalist relief societies—notably the Bowery Mission and the Municipal Lodging House—acknowledge the truth, and admit that there is not “work for all who will.” The work is not to be had; and the worker, his patient wife and tender children must suffer the consequences—or seek relief through the door of suicide.

On the other side of this second picture stand a few, the so-called captains of industry, the great financiers, the overlords of creation. Their wretched captaincy of production, their absolute inefficiency as controllers of the world’s business is just now undergoing one of its periodical exposures, called crises. Their incapacity self-revealed, their foresightedness shown to be nil, their criminal debauching of the code of commercial ethics branded on their brows, are they suffering? Not they—not the big ones. Some score or so of smaller fellows, reduced by their own misdeeds to

the same condition of poverty which the workingman is always in (and which he is taught to look upon as prosperity)—some score or so of these found the condition of owning nothing but their labor power to be so intolerable that they committed “apoplexy,” “heart-failure,” or plain unvarnished suicide, to escape it. But their wealth only went to some others, not a whit better, but only stronger, than they. And these stronger ones, these bigger ones, thus rendered still stronger and bigger by the spoils of their ruined comrades in spoliation are no whit worse off for the panic. On the contrary, they are rubbing their hands in glee over their increased assets. Snug and warm in their palatial clubs or dwellings, they heed not the winter’s bite. The snow and hail falls alike on them and on the workers—but they “have the fur coats.”

Paraphrasing the dray-horse in picture No. 1, should the working class say, “We would have fur cloaks too, if we cost \$5,000”? The statement would be true. No chattel slave worth \$5,000 would ever be left to free himself by suicide from the fangs of hunger and cold. His master would see to it that he was fed and kept in condition. But the day of chattel slavery has rolled away. To return to it would be to turn back the pages of human progress. The race is no longer willing to play at dray-horses for the masters. What the working class should say, recognizing the WHY of the master class’s affluence and their own wretchedness, would be—“We would have fur cloaks too, if we owned the industries!”

Once the working class has said that, the day of its deliverance is at hand.

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

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