

EDITORIAL

A WORD FOR TAMMANY.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE bugaboo cry of “Tammany!” has already gone up from the camp of the “anti-Tammany forces,” that is, from the camp of the “Respectability.” The cry arrived on schedule time. This year a Mayoralty election is due. Before summer is over the cry will be in full blast.

What does it mean?

What Tammany is, that is to say, what is the Tammany standard of political conduct, nobody needs be told. Waste, graft, inefficiency, “pull,” in short robbery, legalized and otherwise, these are features of Tammany. They are hereditary features. But, after all this is said, the essence of Tammany is yet untouched; it is a feature concerning which the anti-Tammany “Respectability” are suspiciously silent—silent in their public declamations; surely quite loquacious in their private and confidential talks among themselves.

What feature may that be?

Tammany is essentially Tweed. That, in turn, brings up the question, what was the essence of Tweed?

To those who look upon Tweed merely as a more or less Napoleonic plunderer the moral lesson, taught by Tweed, is lost.

Tweed was the idol of the populace. He was no skin-flint of a curmudgeon. He was a liberal “giver to the poor.” Capitalist society produces two distinct types of plunderers—one the stony-hearted plunderer, who plunders in order to hoard; the other the tenderhearted plunderer, who plunders to enjoy liberally. The former is a miser; the latter generous. Both are products of that “social science” whose motto is “Do others, or you will be done by them.” Taught that there is no way of “getting there” except by capitalist exploitation the pupils of capitalism start in to plunder, each according to his particular capacity. Some become door-mat thieves, others

highway robbers, so to speak. The latter divide into two categories—the Tweeds and the Respectables. The point of separation lies in their geniality, or, lack of geniality.

The genial ones become Tweeds. Their geniality determines their methods or tools, consequently also their conduct. They gather the disinherited around their standard, organize them, drill them, lead them, plunder wholesale, and return or divide bountifully with their cohorts.

This is the secret of the silence observed by the Respectables upon the essence of Tammany or Tweed.

It must be admitted, if the political economy that the Respectable preach, and that both they and Tammany stand upon, be correct, Tammany has the better cause. Capitalist economics being Presbyterian in the sense that it holds wealth, like grace, is for the few, pinching poverty, like hell fire, is for the many, then, “grab who grab can and how he can” is legitimate. If length of possession cures the original flaw in the moral title of the Respectables, then there can be no inherent immorality in to-day’s plunder by Tammany. Time runs for Tammany as for the Respectables. The present flaw in the former’s title time will heal, exactly as time is supposed by Respectables to have healed the flaw in their own title.

All honor to Tammany—from capitalist premises!

Capitalist premises being conceded, fools are the masses who would raise the Respectable upon their shields. The only sensible thing to do is to boost up Tammany—and then put out hats for a shower of coin, such as Tweed regularly and bountifully bestowed upon the poor “whom he always had with him.”

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

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