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EDITORIAL

MR. MCLAUGHLIN'S BRASS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

COOL as a cucumber Mr. George McLaughlin, Secretary of the State Commission of Prisons, embodies in his report a criticism of the law authorizing the commitment of an employer on a wage earner's execution; and he condemns the law indignantly as "a relic of old barbarous practice to imprison for debt."

Imprisonment for debt can not be condemned too severely. It is stupid, besides barbarous; barbarous, besides stupid.

Typical enough of capitalism is such a manifestation of barbarous stupidity as one of the accompaniments of the birth of "godly capitalism." The greed for property bred in the creditor the notion of ownership in his debtor, whom, if the same could not meet his obligations, the creditor locked up—if he did not quarter. The barbarity of the nation need not be dilated upon; neither should it require space to expose its stupidity: a debtor's opportunity pay is not improved by depriving him of the opportunity to make money. Nevertheless, stupid and barbarous as the practice was, it was a practice of swine towards swine; as such neither deserved much sympathy.

With regard to the law which Mr. McLaughlin criticises the land lies wholly otherwise. That law is not a law which affects traders among themselves, that is, mutual cheats. It is a law between the trader, or capitalist, and the employe. In other words, it is a law for the protection of the proletarian against his plunderer. Capitalist cheats capitalist. It is part of business. None will claim the worker cheats the employer. Experience has proved that the employer, not satisfied with plundering the employe of the bulk of his product and returning to him only a pittance as wages, very often returns nothing to him: goes into bankruptcy: or makes some other crooked jump whereby the employe is left wholly unpaid. The law

empowering the commitment of an employer upon the execution of his wage slave, obviously is intended to treat the employer as a thief and lock him up, unless he restores to his employe the wages that the employe produced and the employer seeks to rob him of. Yet such a law Mr. McLaughlin decries as a piece of the barbarism of imprisoning for "debt"; and such a law he recommends be repealed because, forsooth, the employer's "extra and unavoidable expenses of his own household" may disable him from "promptly paying the wages of his help." What barbarism, in Mr. McLaughlin's opinion, is that of locking up an employer who spent his employes' wages in the unavoidable household expenses of good meals!

Cool as a cucumber?—No. Mr. McLaughlin has enough brass on his cheeks to stock all the counterfeit coppers in circulation.

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

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