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EDITORIAL

A NEW BROOM.

By DANIEL DE LEON

AT the head of {the} alphabetical list of the spic-and-span new Federal Senators stands Henry F. Ashurst, from the spic-and-span new State of Arizona.

On the 22d of May Senator Ashurst “swept” the “Armor Plate Trust.” Following are a few of the things he said:

“When the bids were called for [dying days of the Taft administration], or proposals were published asking for bids for furnishing 8,000 tons of armor plate for the dreadnought *Pennsylvania*, three bids were submitted—one by the Carnegie Steel Co., which is a subsidiary of the United States Steel Co.; one by the Bethlehem Steel Co., of Bethlehem, Pa.; and the third by the Midvale Steel Co., of Philadelphia, Pa. These companies were represented in this city by President Dinkey of the Carnegie Co.; Vice-President Johnston, of the Bethlehem Co.; and Vice-President Petrie, of the Midvale Co. These gentlemen all stopped at one of the leading hotels here, and were frequently in conference. As a consequence, when the bids were opened it occasioned no surprise to find that the bids did not vary a dollar a ton among these three companies . . . but the bids were, in fact, \$34 per ton higher than the price received for armor plate by these three companies on the last previous contract.”

Having swept the dust off the false pretence of competition, and the actual agreement between the “supposed competitors,” the broom proceeded to sweep the dust off some other pretences:

“The price to be paid by the Government under these contracts is \$454 per ton for 8,000 tons of class A armor plate. I have no funds at my disposal with which to employ experts to ascertain at what precise figure armor plate may be purchased, moreover, the best experts in armor are not to be expected to come before Congress and give their knowledge of the cost of armor plate, or to prove the inferiority of armor plate furnished for all or for any battleships, when in so doing they would lose thousands of dollars,

would be discharged from their present situations, and could obtain no further employment from large steel manufacturers; but I have obtained information from what I conceive to be a reliable source that if Congress will offer a proper compensation and protection to experts, they are able to and will furnish evidence showing conclusively that this class A armor plate may be manufactured at large profit at the price of \$254 per ton. If this be true, and many persons believe it can be substantiated, this Government is paying exactly \$200 per ton too much on the 8,000 tons of armor plate to be used in the *Pennsylvania* which makes an excess of \$1,600,000 that we are paying for the armor plate in this one battleship.”

With the dust swept clean from the pretence of “fair commercial dealings,” swept so clean as to leave exposed “collusion” and “extortion” by “this grasping Steel Trust, which extends its hungry and larcenous fingers into the Public Treasury,” the broom goes on undauntedly to raise the dust more completely from two spots that the previous sweeping had partially exposed.

The first spot is the spot of “financial integrity” and of “patriotism,” so much boasted of by our Plutocracy. The broom proceeds, accordingly:

“In addition to the fact that these companies are furnishing armor at an extortionate price there exists also an uncertainty as to how much defective armor has been furnished, or is being furnished. There exists grave doubt as to whether these companies have furnished good armor plate to the Government and not armor that will prove treacherous and defective in the time of the Nation’s greatest need.

“Although the Navy Department some 12 or 14 years ago used considerable care in attempting to conceal the information, it is nevertheless a fact that from certain tests made—which tests were not made voluntarily by the Navy Department, but under pressure from Congress—it was ascertained that plate which was supposed to be the heaviest and strongest was destroyed by an outside explosion of a single Gathmann high-explosive shell, and no recognition of the result of such tests was ever definitely or adequately reported to Congress.”

Finally, the broom having deftly swept the dust from the myth of the “individuality” that capitalism fosters among its employees, the broom makes this last and supplemental sweep:

“Why scrutinize the salary of some overworked and underpaid postal employee [as the Senate Committee recently did in its efforts to reduce salaries], and not chase large game also?”

Nobody broke in upon Senator Ashurst. All the old brooms stood silently leaning against the wall, while the new broom exposed one nasty spot after another—collusion, cheating, treason, and despotism towards employees—in the anatomy of the Capitalist Class.

So long as the Ashurst broom remains new, and doing the proverbial work of new brooms, it will deserve admiration.

But how long will it remain new?

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