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FIRST EDITORIAL

Borrowed Feathers.

By DANIEL DE LEON

Mr. G.C. Clemens, a Kansas “Reformer” and reporter for the Supreme Court of Kansas—a job for which he fished as a reward for his support of the Presidential candidate of the silver mine magnates, who fleece and shoot their workers—imagines that he overthrows the Socialist principle of the class struggle with the following declaration that appears in the *Chicago Record*, and is reproduced in other Western papers:

“When, beginning with Tolstoi, William Morris, Wendell Phillips and others like them, I run back through history to Gaius and Tiberius, Gracchus and to Christ, himself heir to a once splendid throne, and see in every land, in every age, the sons of wealth and men of proud, patrician birth championing the cause of the poor and the oppressed, I grow indignant at the constant assumption that Socialism’s only hope is the helpless poor.”

What this passage does do is to bring into strong relief the fact that the men, whose political tactics require them to deny the class struggle, are so conscious of the impropriety of their own position that, in order to cover it up, they are driven to deck themselves in borrowed feathers. Take each of the names referred to in the above quotation, compare the conduct of the men who bore them with the conduct of the men who quote them, and the Socialist position stands proven, while its adversaries stand convicted. The operation, it will be found in each case, is a repetition of the scene in the fable where the jackdaw is stripped of the beautiful feathers of other birds that it had stolen and was strutting about with.

Can any one imagine Tolstoi fishing for a political job, say as reporter for the Council of Knout-Swingers, by supporting a movement made up of Russian grinders of the faces of the poor? Can any one imagine William Morris fishing for a political job, say as reporter of the British mine owners, by supporting a movement made up of British fleecers of the workers? Can any one imagine Wendell Phillips fishing for a political job, say as reporter for a Northern “dough-face,” by supporting the Douglas¹

¹ Stephen A. Douglas, U.S. Senator from Illinois and Democratic Party nominee for president in

“progressive” wing of the slavocracy? Can anyone imagine Tiberius or Gaius Gracchus fishing for a political job, say as reporter for a Council of Roman Senators, by supporting a movement backed by greedy Roman land sharks? Can any one imagine Christ fishing for a job, say as a reporter of a Sanhedrim, by supporting a political intrigue set on foot by a set of would-be Pharisees? The thing is impossible. Whatever the economic or social class, to which these, and many more such, great historic figures originally belonged, they tore away from the surroundings, they broke with the traditions, they fought the interests of the class that they recognized to be wrong, and uncompromisingly, self-sacrificingly, they planted themselves on the class interests of the class whose emancipation they sought.

The contrast presented between these great figures and the men who quote them to cover up their own crooked jumps illustrates the wisdom of Socialist tactics to trust none who does not squarely stand upon the class interests of the proletariat—a wisdom that can not be blurred except by the borrowed feathers with which such men as Reporter G.C. Clemens seek to deck themselves when they quote the Wendell Phillipses, the Gracchi, etc., but a wisdom that shines forth all the brighter when these jackdaws stand stripped of a halo that is a standing rebuke to them.

[Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.](#)

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