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EDITORIAL

## THE STRIKE CASE STATED.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**A** CORRESPONDENT to the *New York Times* who signs himself “Pro Bono Publico,” gives, apropos of the Interborough strike, his theory on the right to strike. This is “Pro Bono Publico’s” Theory:

“Every man has the right to quit work when he pleases, provided that in so doing he does not unduly infringe the right of others. No surgeon has a right to quit work in the midst of an operation; no actor has a right to quit work in the midst of a play; no plumber has a right to quit work leaving water wasting and sewer gas rushing into a house; no railroad man has a right to quit work leaving passengers and perishable freight stalled, and no Subway man has a right to quit work leaving the population of New York without means of getting to business and returning home.”

Obviously “Pro Bono Publico” did not illustrate further because any further illustration would be superfluous. According to him, no miner has a right to quit work leaving the people of the country without fuel; no hatter, weaver, shoemaker, baker, ironworker, etc., etc., has a right to quit work leaving the people hatless, clothesless, shoeless, breadless, etc., etc., etc.; if he does he is a conspirator and should be dealt with by the Criminal Courts.

“Pro Bono Publico” can not be charges with lack of clearness. He puts his case with admirable precision. According to his theory, the one thing to consider is where the labor performed is one that society needs. That is all-sufficient. If it is such a labor, the stoppage of it can be due only to the guilt of the workingman; the capitalist can not be the guilty party. That is the capitalist’s side.

But in this as in all other cases there is another side to the story. It is this:

“No railroad capitalist has a right to leave the people without means of getting to business and returning home; no mine-owner has a right to leave the people of the country without fuel; no manufacturer of hats, cloth, shoes, breadstuffs, etc.,

etc., etc., has a right to leave people hatless, clothesless, shoeless, breadless, etc., etc., etc.; if he does he is a conspirator against the public weal and should be dealt with as such by the Criminal Court.”

This is the issue between Capital and Labor. Attempts innumerable have been made by all manner of quack doctors to patch up the feud. “Pro Bono Publico” plants it well. It is not a question to be arbitrated or patched up. The leaving of the people without the necessary fuel, clothing, food, etc., etc.,—all the things that they need—is simply a crime. Crimes are not dilly-dallied with. Criminals are not, or should not be propitiated. Who is the criminal?—That is the question.

From the capitalist view point, the working class is the criminal. They should submit to any and everything that the capitalist wants—low wages, poverty, risk of life and limb, deprivation of the enjoyments of family life, deprivation of leisure for intellectual pursuit—they should submit to all. The “public” needs the workingmen’s services; to quit is criminal—so says “Pro Bono Publico,” his “publicus” resolving itself to about 30 per cent. of the population.

From the working class view point, the capitalist class is the criminal. It stands in the way of public happiness. More than 70 per cent. of the population are of the working class. The capitalist class demands that the working class immolate themselves in the interest of the “public.” Seeing that that “public” is mainly of the working class it means that the capitalist seeks to play one portion of the public against another. In the meantime, by his plunder of each separate workingman portion of the “public” the capitalist sacrifices both the public at large and its individual constituencies, and thus keeps society in turmoil. Seeing that capitalists operate their plants not “pro bono publico” but “pro bono proprio” they bring about the distress that marks them criminals.

Who is to settle the question, ascertain and punish the actual criminal?

The same tribunal that has ever settled all such great historic issues. If “Pro Bono Publico” live(s) long enough he will have to join George III., the Bourbon Copperheads and all the “Pro Bono Publici” who have preceded him and of whom he is a twentieth-century vestige.

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

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