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EDITORIAL

“STEALING THUNDER”.

By DANIEL DE LEON

MR. Jack London, described as a young San Francisco journalist, and who has latterly burst forth across the literary firmament as a Socialist and a propounder of Socialism, appears with a new book entitled the *War of the Classes*. The burthen of this book's song is that the ruling class is “stealing the thunder” of Socialism and the charge is attempted to be proved by the prevailing and increasing rage for “municipalization.” Both the allegation and the reasoning are false.

If “municipalization” is what Socialism aims at, then it is not Capitalism that is stealing the thunder of Socialism, but Socialism that is purloining the thunder of Capitalism. Long before Socialism advanced its tenets and unfurled its flag, Capitalism started in to “municipalize”, and did “municipalize” many a function that was previously a private industry. The Fire and Police Departments are instances in point; and the principle was extended by Capitalism to the national sphere when it wiped out the private undertakings of mercenary armed bands and letter-carrying, nationalized both, together with other such one-time private industries, and established the Post Office, the War Department, etc. Surely not Jove but Prometheus was a thief of thunder. If “municipalization”, or even “nationalization” is the thunder that Socialism is playing at, then, as well charge Jove with stealing the flickering flames of Prometheus, as charge Capitalism with stealing the thunder of Socialism when the capitalist class flashes its “municipalization” or “nationalization” lightning with the accompanying roll of thunder.

“Municipalization” and “nationalization” are stages in capitalist development; they are stages closely parallel with the development of feudalism when the overlord shore the crests of his feudal grandees, and, one after another,

“municipalized” or “nationalized”, in short, absorbed the feudal functions that they once exercised and enjoyed. No bourgeois of the then oncoming class of Capitalism ever for a moment imagined the slightest relief from the then process of feudal “municipalization” and “nationalization”; nor did it enter his head that the feudal overlord was stealing bourgeois thunder, much as appearances might seem to point in that direction. What the bourgeois strove after was the snapping of the bonds of feudality that hampered his motions; never an instant was he deceived by the circumstance that, because the number of his exploiters decreased, he, therefore, was freer; as fast as these decreased he felt the power of the increasing exploiter increase, the latter’s grip more merciless upon his neck, the latter’s fingers more greedily rummaging in his pockets. Exactly so with the “municipalizations” and “nationalizations” of Capitalism. As the feudal lords “pooled their issues” by merging their powers in the feudal central authority, so do the capitalist lords, today, “pool their issues” by “municipalization” and “nationalization” schemes—huge mergers in which union adds suction-power to capitalist tentacles and tyrant-power to capitalist claws.—Not such is the aim of Socialism; not of such material is its thunder. The thunder of Socialism begins and ends with the demand for the abolition of wage-slavery—and that lightning no capitalist Jove dare monkey with, let alone steal.

Mr. Jack London is a young man; the sun-burst of Socialism seems to dazzle him; its fresh breath seems to make him reel with the intoxication of delight. It is to be hoped that he is not too permanently young to realize that he has yet to learn what Socialism is, and that he be endowed with sufficient earnestness to acquire the knowledge, and cease allowing his facile pen to act as a conjurer of lures that promote capitalist manœuvres.

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

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slpns@slp.org