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EDITORIAL

“INDEPENDENCE,” OR “INDIVIDUALITY,” A LA CAPITALISM

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE capitalist press is circulating a story of how Claus Spreckels, of San Francisco, Cal., “made” four million dollars by compelling President Joseph Crockett, of the San Francisco Gas and Electric Company, to power a rival light plant which Spreckels had erected in a spirit of revenge against Crockett.

The story goes that Spreckels had erected a new office building. Later, half a block away, Crockett put up a new power house, whose chimneys deluged Spreckels’ tenants with soot and smoke, whereupon they complained long and bitterly to their landlord. Spreckels sought to induce Crockett to abate the nuisance, but without success, his only reward being a curt and cutting personal reply. Spreckels, stung to the quick, then started a rival company—the Independent—and brought gas down from \$2 to 50 cents a thousand cubit feet. The competition was such that Crockett finally bought out Spreckels’ plant, paying \$6,000,000 for what had only cost \$2,000,000, and more than covering any damage that Spreckels may have sustained from the smoke nuisance. Of course, Spreckels is regarded as a shrewd capitalist and Crockett as a beaten man, but the story has another and a better moral to it.

If there is anything that the capitalist class delights in extolling, above all others, it is independence, or individuality, especially at this time of the year, when the reading of the Declaration of Independence is all the vogue! It was this spirit of independence and individuality that Spreckels displayed in the measures he adopted against Crockett. With millions at his command, Spreckels was enabled to assert himself, and, to the demands of self-respect, add the levy of a tribute, which Crockett was compelled to pay. Independence or individuality, backed by material resources, triumphed!

Independence, or individuality, being thus found only possible where material

resources abound, what will be said of the “independence” or “individuality” of the millions of wage workers devoid of such resources? What will be said, for instance, of the “independence” or “individuality” of the 400,000 San Franciscans, who, as producers and consumers of gas not possessed of Spreckels’ millions, wherewith to build a rival plant, will have to pay, in the form of increased labor and increased prices for light, the enormous sum which Crockett’s monopoly will now demand in order to make good Spreckels’ raid upon its treasury?

Again, what will be said of the “independence” and “individuality” of the greater part of the population of these United States, which depends for its existence on the ownership of the nation’s natural resources and capital by a plutocratic class numbering less than 3 per cent. of the nation—the small class which, owning all the factories, mills, mines, means of communication and transportation, land and financial institutions of the country, will only consent to their use by the great majority—the working class—on condition that that great majority submit to economic degradation and exploitation—to wage slavery?

It will be said that such “independence” or “individuality” is unworthy any other name than dependence or slavery.

Only where Socialism restores the natural resources and capital of the nation to the nation, as it intends, will there be true “independence.” This {is} the moral the Spreckels-Crockett makes clear.

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