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EDITORIAL

THE TELEGRAPHERS' CONVENTION.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE Commercial Telegraphers' Union of America meets to-day in this city in national convention. The date of the meeting was chosen as that on which, twenty years ago, the great telegraphers' strike of 1883 started. The date is well chosen. Past deeds are sign posts. If they be not wreathed in laurels of victory, that serve to kindle the spirit to self-emulation, yet the tokens of defeat may serve the useful purpose of instruction.

The strike of twenty years ago was a failure. It was engaged in under scores of illusions. There was the illusion of "public sympathy,"—the sympathy was there, but it was empty-handed; telegraphs and letters of encouragement came in and were heaped up in tall heaps at headquarters; but the strikers looked upon the heaps disconsolate: they contained no money orders, while the company's treasury bulged with the wealth these employees had been sweated of. There was the illusion of "not enough men to take our places,"—the men to take the places of the strikers came in from all sides; the reserve army of unemployed did to perfection one of the principal works that capitalism keeps it there for, to wit, take the places of men who, having had some earnings and something to chew, are not as limp as those as those who had no earnings, and, consequently, nothing to chew. The illusion was there that the men of the union would "all stick together"—but they did not: tutored in the belief that the capitalist system was "the only natural and possible" social order, the traitor was bred as naturally as swamps breed mosquitos, and so forth. The strike failed. In failing it tore down the illusions. At least it tore down the facts on which the illusions hung. The strike of twenty years ago and the lessons it taught are a matchless sign-post by which a telegraphers' convention should guide its acts. Nor are recent facts wanted that point the finger to the sign-post with added emphasis.

On Sunday, June 21, the *Daily People* contained an article on the telegraphers. The article was as full of facts as an egg is of meat. Of course, the facts—as how else can facts do?—pointed out to the telegraphers the false road they were treading. Of course, the facts—and what other conclusions can the marshaling of facts lead to?—made clear to the men that theirs is no longer a choice between bad or a little better, but between a plunge downward or total emancipation from capitalist thralldom: either submit to become coolies, or overthrow the capitalist system. The third of the illusions enumerated above as having been torn down twenty years ago has been torn down again—to those aware of the occurrence and who have brains to think. In order that the convention that meets to-day, and to most of whose members the occurrence may have escaped, it is here repeated. On Monday, June 29, the *Daily People* published the following letter from a telegrapher:

On Watch for Capitalism.

To the *Daily* and *Weekly People*.—I received a sample copy of your paper yesterday, and so did a great many other operators employed here in the Postal Telegraph office, 253 Broadway. Eastlake, the grand secretary-treasurer of the Commercial Telegraphers' Union, got hold of a copy of the paper and IMMEDIATELY TOOK IT TO MR. SHIRLEY, THE MANAGER. I wish to inform you that Eastlake's first name is Wilbur, instead of William, as you have it.

Telegrapher.

New York, June 27, 1903.

Whose agent is Mr. Wilbur Eastlake, the men's or the employer's? Whose representative is he supposed to be, the fleeced telegraphers' or the fleecing capitalist's? He evidently is a watch-dog. But for whom?

Twenty years hence—if by that time, despite the combined efforts of the telegraphic companies and their Eastlakes, there is still any starch left in the telegraphers and they should still try to strike—the striking telegraphers will be again defeated as completely as they were defeated twenty years ago.

Twenty years hence—if the telegraphers and, along with them, the other trades, have been cured of their illusions, have come to recognize facts, and have organized themselves in a sound organization of their class, pledged to overthrow capitalism and leave no room in its own ranks for the watch-dogs of

capitalism,—there will be nothing to strike against. The working class will be in full possession of its own. The capitalist class will be off its back.

It all lies in the turning of a hand.

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