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EDITORIAL

A GRIM HUMORIST

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE Hon. Carroll D. Wright has appeared in a new role, the role of a humorist. Speaking at Leominster, Mass., on the 27th of March, on “The Relation of Modern Industry to Intellectual Development” the gentleman said:

“If we look at the industrial struggle of this country, we find the most emphatic endorsement of the idea that the present industrial order stimulates intellectual development.”

This is humor, altho grim humor.

The humorist who would say that midnight conflagrations in double decker tenement houses furnish an “emphatic endorsement” of the idea that a good hot fire, suddenly blazing into a bedroom at night, “stimulates intellectual development” in that even the drowsiest will display a wondrous amount of liveliness, agility and quickness of wit;—the humorist, who would get off such a joke would not hold a candle to the Hon. Carroll D. Wright. For one thing, his joke could not have a “large and appreciative audience”—comparatively few people have been in the fix of a midnight fire to appreciate how such an event “stimulates intellectual development”; for another thing, he could not illustrate the point in himself while he spoke—an object lesson or pantomime always is a lift to a joke. The joke of the Hon. Carroll D. Wright is free from both drawbacks.

No doubt the modern industrial system, Capitalism, for short, is a great stimulator of intelligence. It is one of its distinctive features, a feature that distinguishes it from all other and previous systems of class tyranny. All previous systems rather tended to benumb the revolutionary class. The capitalist system, however, obedient to its own inherent law—a law that fain it would, but cannot

escape—not only raises the revolutionary class that must overthrow it, in order that civilization shall not perish, but prods, and goads it on like a conflagration, that compels people to quit a burning house. Capitalism is a conflagration upon a world-wide basis, with a world-intensity of flame. Whatever drowsy dullard imagines HE will be able to “get along,” soon finds his “intellectual development stimulated.” The flames begin to singe his clothes and hair. His intellect develops marvelously under the stimulus of the lambent flames that seek to caress him. With its rapid throwing out of workers through the improved privately owned machine; with its declining, and inevitably declining standard of living for the working class; with its ruthless expropriation of the small fellow; in short, with its thousand and one unavoidable tongues of fire, Capitalism renders life so increasingly unbearable to the large majority of the tenants in the double-decker of capitalist society, that their intellectual development is stimulated to the point of realizing that Capitalism is no longer a habitable institution, and of perceiving with more or less distinctness the superb dome of the fire-proof Socialist Republic. It certainly is grim humor to call attention, however correctly, to the quick and helter-skelter exit of the masses from the burning structure of capitalist society as the result of the stimulating effect of Capitalism upon intellectual development.

Moreover, the joke had its pantomimic illustration. It was illustrated by the Hon. Carroll D. Wright as he spoke, in his own person. No straining of the imagination can picture to the mind an attache of the feudal system who was himself feudalized, that is, who bore on his own body the scars of feudal oppression, singing the praises of feudalism. Feudalism did many things but it never “stimulated intellectual development” to the point of producing such an intellectual acrobat as the Hon. Carroll D. Wright. On the contrary, feudalism had a positively benumbing power in that direction. Just the opposite with Capitalism. Such is the chemical power of its flames that not a few of those whom it scorches and whose life it renders untenable find their intellectual development so stimulated that they turn into Carroll D. Wrights, who can actually perform the feat of facing an audience, and entertaining it for over an hour with a wondrous juggle of words—all for a living, or, to stick to the comparison, as a hose that they play on themselves in order to keep their own clothes, hair and skin wet so that the capitalist

conflagration may not burn them to a crisp and on the spot.

Aye, it is true, and nobody rues the fact more bitterly than the capitalist class itself—its social system does furnish a “most emphatic endorsement of the idea” that the present industrial system of society “stimulates intellectual development”; although, as illustrated in the person of the Hon. Carroll D. Wright, the intellectual development stimulated, besides being bizarre, is barren; while, with the masses of the people, the intellectual development stimulated, though it is truly suggestive of the amusing-tragic sights seen at fires, is fruitful. Of it is born the Socialist Republic, where the Biblical precept will cease to be a hollow hypocrisy-inspiring motto—“He who does not work, neither shall he live.”

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