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EDITORIAL

CAUGHT IN A CLEFT STICK.

By DANIEL DE LEON

IT is a cruel blow that the Vienna shoemakers have planted on the smeller of the “statistics” and orations that the Republican and Democratic politicians are in the habit of reeling off before workingmen constituencies on the higher earnings of “American Labor” and the low wage scale of the “pauper Labor of Europe.” An enterprising American capitalist proposed to set up shoe-shops in Austria, and he announced that he could sell American shoes there “30 per cent cheaper” than they could be produced on the spot. His capacity to do so was not questioned for a moment by the Vienna trade; it “rose en masse,” and declared that it would wreck the establishment the moment he started to float his “cheap labor” stuff, claiming that his success meant their ruination. Matters are now at that pass. The contestants may be left to themselves for the present, while we turn the telescope upon this tell-tale incident.

Goods produced in one place, 30 per cent cheaper than in another, whatever special brand they may carry, carry most suspiciously the brand of “Exploitation.” The machine does not lighten labor. The old observation of John Stuart Mill holds as good to-day as it did when first uttered: it is doubtful whether improved machinery has lightened the burden of toil. Even if the hours of labor are reduced, the burden is not. With it, the machine brings on intensification of labor. The almost miracle-performing shoe making machines are instances in point. Incomparably intenser is the labor that goes with them; proportionally greater is the exploitation of the operative. An idea of the greater quantity of life-tissue consumed by the modern machine-made shoe may be formed by coupling the dreams of wealth indulged in by the American shoe capitalist in question with the volume of opposition that his scheme has provoked among the Vienna operators. The whole may be well gauged by the statement “30 per cent cheaper.” And there goes staggering and reeling the Goliath falsehood regarding the superior economic condition of American Labor when compared with the “pauper Labor of Europe.”

The giant falsehood staggers and reels, hit between the eyes by the little pebble of fact.

Nor does that giant alone totter. With him is knocked both under and above belt the false pretences of his monkey, the American Labor Fakir. Only the other day, Sam Gompers, bell-cap on head and bauble in hand, did the clown act between the colossal legs of his capitalist giant master, and “scorned to have American Labor reduced to Austrian conditions.” It is the Austrian worker who spurns Gompersian conditions.

And right he is.

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

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