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EDITORIAL

“ON THE ROARING BILLOWS,” OR “TALKING IT OVER” [THE RETURN TRIP].

By DANIEL DE LEON

A STEAMER, bound for New York, left the port of Liverpool several weeks ago with a large number of passengers, among whom were two gentlemen—Lawrence Murphy and John Black. The two gentlemen were on their return trip. They had gone out a few months before. As then, so were they now always together and always in close conversation; as then, so was there now on board a Marconi wireless telegraphic apparatus, which was now shipped back to New York; as then, so did passengers Murphy and Black now happen to choose for their conversation a secluded spot quite close to where the said apparatus happened to be; and as then, the said apparatus now happened to be boxed in such poor material that there was a wide rent in the wood facing the spot where Murphy and Black habitually communed together. When, upon arrival at the factory in New York, the box was opened, the sensitive plates were again found scribbled all over with sound waves. Being deciphered, the sound waves revealed a rather queer conversation. The wireless scientists laid the thing aside, unable to make out what it really meant, and half imagining it was a joke someone had perpetrated upon them. Two days ago, happening to glance at the plates, and having still fresh on their minds the reports of the trial and conviction of Lawrence Murphy, ex-treasurer of the Journeymen Stonecutters' Union, for larceny on the charge of having stolen \$12,000 from the union's treasury, the wireless scientists read the thing over again, and sent the transcript to this office, thinking it might throw some light upon the case.

It does. A good deal of light. The sound waves evidently were produced by a conversation between Lawrence Murphy and Black, the same as had happened on

the way out. Not less so than the first conversation, reproduced in these columns last week, this one is thrilling enough for yellow covers, and helps to clear up much that needs clearing up. Again leaving out the profanity, which is simply indicated in dashes, the dialogue is reproduced below under the same title as before:

“On The Roaring Billows,” or “Talking It Over.”

[The Return Trip.]

[N.B. The only insertions here made are “M,” which stands for Murphy, and “B,” which stands for Black. These initials, of course, did not appear on the wireless telegraph plates. But they are inserted to help the reader understand the conversation. For the rest, the context sufficiently indicates when it is that Murphy speaks and when Black.]

B.—In your place I wouldn’t go back to New York.

M.— —!

B.—I wouldn’t!

M. Why in — shouldn’t I?

B.—Hasn’t your Union secured an indictment against you for grand larceny?

M.—Yes.

B.—You will be nabbed soon as you land.

M.—And I’ll be acquitted.

B.—Acquitted! You told me yourself you had taken the money; and they surely can prove it.

M.—You’re a silly guy. What is it I did tell you?

B.—You told me how you and those in the ring with you saw to it that your Union kept out rafts of men from joining; how the contractor was thus compelled to employ non-Union men; how you winked at that; and how after a while you pounced upon the contractor, threatening a strike if he did not pay the fine imposed for employing non-Union men. You told me then how you had whacked about \$10,000 from the contractors in that way, and with that dough we went to Europe and had a good time. Wasn’t that it?

M.—Just so, and that is no larceny upon the Union.

B.—On whom then?

M.—On nobody. Let me give ye a few points on law. Thet was extortion. I extorted thet money from the contractors.

B.—What’s the difference?

M.—A — of a difference. Difference enough to acquit me. Now listen. The charge is thet I stole thet money from the Union.

B.—Yes.

M.—To steal a thing from some one thet person must have a legal title to it. Had the Union a legal title to what I wrongfully got from some one

else?

B.—Thet beats me!

M.—’Tis this way, before I can be convicted the Judge thet charges the jury must place the stamp of legality upon the manner in which thet money was got. That means to legalize extortion. Ten to one he won’t. He may, tho’. He may take the bit in his own mouth, and so may the jury, yielding to popular clamor. But then there are Courts of Appeal. They can’t yield to thet sort of a thing.

B.—And suppose they do?

M.—If judges and juries and all goes crazy and yields to popular clamor, then this chicken is pork. But whet’s the odds? In Europe I would starve; here I have a good chance of escaping, and if I do I’ll make some more big hauls.

B.—As a Union officer again?

M.—Sure!

B.—Won’t the rank and file be wild at you for not heveng shared with them?

M.—Tut! tut! You must have forgotten one-half whet I told you.

B.—Whet was thet?

M.—About the Social Democrats.

B.—I should say those were just the class of curs thet would jump on a fellow when he was down and make believe they are great friends of the rank and file.

M.—They may like to, but thet’s as far as them mugs will get. See? Me and me friends, we just shakes our fists under their noses. See? We just tells them to smell that bunch o’ bones. See? And they quake in their boots, and lie down like lambs. And then we goes and sees the *Volkszeitung* corporation, and we tells that bunch: “If yez don’t call off your whelps, and if yez trims your sails to thet — — *Daily People* and them — — — — of the Socialist labor Party, and if your papers don’t quit echoing that — *Daily People*, if yez don’t, then we won’t give yez any money. No doing as we wants, no money: No washee no ticketee.” See? And we then gets them to write some article on how we “nobly wages the class struggle;” and how the S.L.P. can never make progress by “hostilizing the Unions;” and thet the way to do is to “bore from within;” and all thet sort of thing. We can settle them gibbering monkeys easy.

B.—But the rank and file, the bona fide members.

M.—Rank and file here, rank and file there! What in — is the rank and file of such Unions as we gets up good for if not to furnish us, who are clever, a chance to live in clover? Them we nettles somehow, we frightens them by calling them “scabs” if they don’t stand by the officers. Thet’s whet Gompers does. Now, listen: Thet S.L.P. is daft with its gabble-gabble about the working class. Thet working class is good only for us officers, thet — — *Daily People* calls us “fakirs,” to ride and skin. See? Did you ever hear of the rank and file of the Typographical Union getting as much as the sight

of any of that \$300,000 that the *Sun* paid to stop the boycott? And yet they were taxed hard and heavy for that strike! See? That’s all right!

B.—And say you escape from the courts, regain the support of the Social Democrats, and browbeat the rank and file.

M.—If I escape the courts, I’m hunkydory!

B.—Not so fast. Can’t the District Attorney have you indicted for extortion?

M.—Ha! Ha! Ha!

B.—Can’t he?

M.—Who are to be his witnesses?

B.—Why, the contractors whom you extorted moneys from.

M.—Ha! Ha! Ha!

B.—How so?

M.—You must be very innocent. Now, see here: Did you ever see a raft in an old neglected building?

B.—Lots of times.

M.—Covered all over with vermin?

B.—Yes.

M.—Well, that’s the way with them contractors, and I surmises, to judge from the stock quotations and failures elsewhere, that that’s the way with the capitalists generally. They moves on the ragged edge. The safety of the one is got only with the ruin of the other. They are like vermin hanging to old rafts. One shoves the other off and down. Now, them contractors have again and again come to us, each wanting us to declare a strike on the other. And we, you remember who “we” is?

B.—Quite well: Some officers, a few dummies of the rank and file on the floor and a few Social Democrats to whoop it up for you as “noble wagers of the class struggle.”

M.—You got it pat. We, then, declare a strike against the sucker who offers the smallest wad. And we keeps it up. And we reports “strikes settled to the satisfaction of all concerned.” And that gets into the reports of the Labor Commissioner. And the contractors keep mum. And they must because each carries a dirk up his sleeves for the others. Now tell me, who is going to dare give evidence against us? Do you think a single — — — — would — —.

Here the dialogue breaks off suddenly. The sound waves on the plates become too confused to read. They seem to indicate that Murphy and Black were roaring aloud together, and that they both rolled off their campstools with a great clatter.

Unquestionably the dialogue—if only profanity were not so much interwoven in it—could be delivered as a lecture on Sociology and the Labor Movement in America. It is a fortunate thing that the wireless scientists had the good sense to

send it to this office.

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