

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 4, NO. 72.

NEW YORK, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 1903.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

AN “INFAMOUS” FACT.

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THE Labor Day speech of President Theodore Roosevelt, expected by his class and intended by him to be a pronouncement upon the Social Question, is all that it was intended and expected to be. The following passage contains the gist of the speech:

“It is an infamous thing in our American life, and fundamentally treacherous to our institutions, to apply to any man any test save that of his personal worth, or to draw between two sets of men any distinction save the distinction of conduct, the distinction that marks off those who do well and wisely from those who do ill and foolishly.”

The Italian proverb embalms the fact that the tongue touches where the tooth aches. The spot where the tooth aches in the American capitalist head is that in which the social and economic development has undermined the one-time oneness of the American population, and has brought on the rottenness of class conditions. Starting with surroundings that no other bourgeois, or small capitalist class, started with in any other country, the American population may be said to have started classless. The smallness of the tool of production at the incipience of capitalism made its acquisition theoretically easy everywhere. But everywhere else, except America, the theoretic ease was annulled by the surrounding facts. Everywhere else, natural opportunities were pre-empted, and thus everywhere else the bourgeois stepped upon the stage of history with a supply of proletariat. In other words, everywhere else capitalist society was born with class distinctions. In America, the theoretical ease with which the tool of production could be secured by the individual was rendered a fact by the boundless natural opportunities lying open, ready at hand and accessible to all. Poverty and continued dependence could then be ascribed to individual unfitness. A competence and economic independence

were the reward of industry. Under such conditions there were no classes or class distinctions, properly speaking.

But whatever the then conditions, they carried latent in their folds the economic laws of capitalism. The once boundless natural opportunities were seized, and the tool of production grew to the point when, even with natural opportunities open, it could no longer be produced by the individual in a lifetime. What with the vanishing of natural opportunities and the growth of the tool (capital), economic independence and a competence ceased to be the reward of industry: they became the reward of the private ownership in the land on, and the capital with which to labor. Industry became the batch of poverty, idleness the batch of affluence. The classes had developed and with them the class distinctions—on the one hand, the Capitalist Class, owning the necessaries of production, and thereby able to subjugate and plunder those who did not; on the other hand, the Working Class, stripped of the necessaries of production, and thereby compelled to submit to be subjugated and plundered.

Obviously, a thorough recognition of the facts—of the sharp, impassable class distinction—on the part of plundered Working Class would put an end to the horrors of the capitalist system—the Socialist Republic would be born. Obviously, the preservation of the illusion of the one-time conditions, when there were no classes in America, is the very breath in the nostrils of the plundering Capitalist Class in America: so essential to them is the preservation of the illusion that the capitalists in America will go through all imaginable contortions in order to look what they are not.

Seven years ago, when in the Socialist Labor Party grove, Peter E. Burrowes was still among the straightest plants, he caught the inspiration of this scientific truth, unflinchingly upheld and lived up to by the Socialist Labor Party alone, and poetically reproduced it in these columns in the following picture:

“Pluto, the capitalist, is a criminal, hard to identify because we have not yet identified ourselves. He is hard to identify and means to be harder. Oh, how he objects to be distinguished from the working class; how he struggles; how he protests: how, like the people we read of in the reception rooms of prisons—those hardened fellows, whose faces the police desire to put on record in the rogues’ gallery—he squirms and seeks to put on the

mien of a worker to disguise his identity!”

President Roosevelt’s Labor Day speech was excellent. He put his tongue squarely on the nerve that aches in the tooth in the head of capitalism. Nor does his pronouncing “infamous” the Socialist principle of the Class Struggle detract from the merit of the speech. On the contrary, it emphasizes its merit by emphasizing the leading social-economic fact of the times. It were too much to ask of human nature that a hard-pushed beneficiary of the dying social system of capitalism to pronounce “famous” the mortal disease, whose throbbings and thumpings are beating the system’s funeral marches to the grave.

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

Uploaded January 2007