

EDITORIAL

INVESTIGATE?—BOSH!

By DANIEL DE LEON

“DISGRACEFUL!” “Shameful!” “Inhuman!” “Criminal!” “Horrible!” “Dereliction of Duty by Factory Inspectors!” “Appalling!” “Ghastly!” —what a lot of hard names from the bourgeois press, excitedly to belabor the March 25 fire at the factory building on Washington Place, where near to 200 working girls and men were injured more or less severely, and many burned alive!

Is it an accident that the event followed close upon the heels of the decision, solemnly rendered by the Court of Appeals, declaring unconstitutional the Workmen’s Compulsory Compensation law, which sought to indemnify workers for injury sustained in occupations that are inherently dangerous, that is, where the risk undertaken is obvious?

There is no such thing as “accident.” The human bonfire on Washington Place illuminates the decision: the decision pronounces the bonfire constitutional.

About thirteen years ago Judge Bartlett threw out of Court the suit for damages of a girl whose right arm was injured due to defective strapping in the factory, and had to be amputated up to the shoulder. The reason for the non-suit given by the learned Judge was “Obvious Risk.”

The two decisions establish that there is no hard and fast line to draw between avoidable and unavoidable accidents to workmen. It being “positively unconstitutional” to indemnify the workman for injury sustained in cases of unavoidable accidents, that is, where the occupation is “inherently dangerous,” and the risk run, therefore, obvious, it follows that the only safe thing to do, lest the mortal sin of violating the Constitution be incurred, is to recognize ALL occupations as “inherently dangerous,” ALL as beset with “obvious risk,” hence to look upon all injury sustained by the worker as the “Act of God,” leaving no room for indemnity.

Judge Bartlett blazoned the way for this understanding of the situation. The unanimous decision of the Court of Appeals, just rendered, elaborated the point in all its details of Constitution. And now each separate dying flicker of the Washington Place holocaust limns upon the charred corpses of working people the ghost of the Notion that ours is a “Government of the people, by the people, for the people,” and each flash of flame that went up from the burning building penciled on the cupola of the heavens above the device:—“CAPITALIST CLASS SOCIETY IS AN OBVIOUS RISK FOR THE WORKING CLASS.”

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Investigate?

Similar “accidents” have happened before—buildings from which Trinity Church Corporation and Columbia College drew rent have collapsed without notice, burying hundreds of people under the debris; excursion boats have blown up or sunk down with their freight of humanity; factory fires have occurred and recurred sending to kingdom come hundreds upon hundreds of working people; mines have caved in engulfing the workers, etc.; etc; and so on the country over. These “accidents” have all been “investigated”—and each investigation only the prelude for the next “accident.”

Seek to ascertain the “parties responsible”? Can individuals be held responsible for “Acts of God”? Can they be blamed for “Inherent Danger”?

Bosh!

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Either the Obvious Risk of the Capitalist System is of God ordained and immutable by man—and then all investigation is impious presumption, and all punishment of “responsible parties” but the pagan’s practice of scape-goatism;

Or the Obvious Risk of the Capitalist System is of man made, and by man unmakeable.

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There is but one Commission that can “investigate”; but one Grand Jury that can indict; but one Trial Jury that can convict in the premises—that Commission is the Socialist Movement, that Grand Jury the Socialist organization, that Trial Jury

the industrially organized useful labor of the land, marshalled on the political and the economic field.

That Commission need not wait to be appointed—social evolution has appointed it; that Grand Jury need not wait to be paneled—Science has paneled it. The two have ascertained the facts, drawn up the indictment, and named the culprit—CAPITALISM. As to the Trial Jury, it still lags behind, though assuredly drawing together.

Investigate!?!—Bosh!

The hour calls for Conviction and Sentence.

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