

## Fraud and Imposture at Modern Funerals (March 30, 1901)

Two funerals of international interest have recently occurred. Queen Victoria of England and ex-President Harrison of the United States furnished the subjects, and their subjects furnished the funerals. The pomp and panegyric of these occasions dominated for days the columns of nearly every newspaper in Christendom. The amount of sham and hypocrisy that characterizes the burial of a modern ruler, no matter how useless, corrupt, or cruel, seems incredible to a sane person. The dead are always great as gods and immaculate as virgins. The press gushes with all its reserve force and a mighty flood of fulsome flatulency inundates the country. Thousands vie with each other to honor (?) the dead, and all the adjectives are strained to give eclat to the grave occasion.

Queen Victoria lived and preyed upon her subjects as long as she could. She did not surrender the scepter until death wrung it from her nerveless grasp. All her long life she had been a parasite. She held the working class in sovereign contempt. They were only fit to labor, propagate their species, and die. This is the estimate all royalty places upon the working animals of the world. The queen was entitled to no special credit for dying. She simply could not help it.

Thousands of women, immeasurably her superior in all the qualities that distinguish true womanhood, die in England every year, but they go to their graves unhonored and unsung. Only a titled parasite excites the adulation of all mankind. We have traveled but little beyond the chattel slave who bowed in the dust before his master and poured out his gratitude for his chains.

The burial of General Harrison was equal in pomp and display to that of the English queen. The funeral pageant was gorgeous with military trappings and this was its distinguishing feature. The report says: "The military display has not been equaled in Indiana since the breaking out of the Spanish-American War, when the state troops were mobilized. The entire National Guard was ordered out to escort the body of Indiana's distinguished citizen from the family residence to the state house."

In our capitalist society the military establishment is growing steadily in power and popularity. Whether it be an inauguration, a funeral, or a

labor strike, the soldiers are at the head of the procession and give military supremacy to the occasion. There is significance in this which reveals the tendency and design of capitalist development.

Benjamin Harrison was in some respects a superior man, while in some essential qualities he fell far short, and yet the press, in solemn accord, held him up as a paragon of virtue, a flawless model, a composite Lincoln, Washington, and Jesus Christ; and the multitude would scarcely have been astonished had the heavens opened wide to receive the dead president amidst the acclamation of angels. Why this exaggeration, hypocrisy, sham, flattery, fraud, and colossal lying when a public man dies? He is no better dead than living, and living or dead the truth should be spoken.

“The Nation Mourns” is one of the favorite figures. It is the veriest balderdash. The nation mourns for nobody. Of course the crowds gather, the bands turn out, and the “mourners” parade, but they do all that on very slight provocation, whether the occasion be a funeral or a picnic.

The great crowd at Indianapolis would have been on hand had the occasion been an inauguration, a prize fight, or a lynching, and from much of the same sense of patriotic duty.

General Harrison was held up as the loftiest of patriots when in fact he never rendered his country a service which he was not well paid for.

Tens of thousands are yearning to sacrifice themselves upon the altar of their country at the same price. In all his ambitions he served himself first, and whether as lawyer, soldier, or statesman, he demanded and received all the compensation his service would command.

But that is not what prompted the writing of this letter.<sup>1</sup> The biography of the ex-President has not been completed by his admirers of the capitalist press. Several incidents of consequence have been overlooked and in the interest of truth I propose supplying them.

Benjamin Harrison was first and last in the service of the capitalist class. He was the enemy of working men. The capitalist press may deny it, but his record proves it.

When the great railroad strikes of 1877 reached Indianapolis, Harrison made his way into a meeting of strikers and in a speech proceeded to insult and discredit them. Among other things he denounced them as a mob of lawbreakers, declaring that if he were in authority he would put them back to work if he had to do it at the point of a bayonet. He was roundly hissed by the striking railroad employees and they let the hall in

a body. The *Indianapolis News* said at the time, in reporting the speech, "...at this point the railroad portion of the audience rose en masse and made a break for the door."

Scores of men who attended that meeting, many of whom I personally knew, testified that Harrison declared in the same speech that a workingman could live on a dollar a day and that he ought to be willing to do it. Following the meeting, talk of mobbing the speaker was freely indulged in by the enraged strikers and their friends.

It was at this time that Benjamin Harrison organized Company C, consisting of 111 men, and had them armed with Springfield rifles for the purpose of shooting down the half-starved and unoffending strikers, and he had personal command of the company. Mayor Cavin had a different feeling toward the strikers and had 300 of them sworn in to protect railroad property and keep the peace, and it was thus that bloodshed was averted.

At this time Harrison was a railroad attorney and when the strike was over he followed up and prosecuted the strikers. Innocent men were arrested and jailed and Harrison succeeded in sending four of them to prison. The railroads paid him liberally for his infamous services, the records showing that he received \$21,000 from the Ohio and Mississippi Company.

The ex-President once made a speech in which he described his observation of a gang of street cleaners at work. He told about watching the poor devils who receive about \$1.25 per day and how much time they waste during the day, reciting in detail how they first stop to take a chew of tobacco, then a drink of water, then to spit on their hands and so on, minutely, to the discredit and ridicule of the poor street workers, who, to a man with a heart in his breast, would appeal to the sympathy and a desire to aid, and could only extort a contemptuous sneer from a nature coldblooded and callous as a graven image.

When Grover Cleveland, while President, in 1894, ordered out the federal troops to murder workingmen at the command of the railroad companies, Benjamin Harrison heartily approved the action and publicly declared that had he been President at the time he would have pursued precisely the same course.

These are a few plain facts that should not be overlooked when the record is made up. Mr. Harrison has gone to his rest. I would do his

memory no injustice, but out of respect for the truth I would have the record read just as he made it.

In all this there is a lesson for the workingmen. As long as they elect corporation attorneys and other hirelings of the capitalist class to rule them, the same consequences will follow, and they will be responsible for them. But gradually they are beginning to see. The glamor of imposture will not forever blind them. They are opening their eyes to the true meaning of military display and the “old soldier” fraud upon the government. The class conflict is appealing to them as never before; they are grasping the class-conscious doctrine and are filled and thrilled with the spirit of the coming revolution. The capitalist system must go, and with it all its shams, hypocrisies, and frauds, to make way for the socialist commonwealth and the reign of man.

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<sup>1</sup> Apparently written as a letter to the editor of the *Social Democratic Herald*, but published as a lead article.