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EDITORIAL

## A MICROCOSM OF CAPITALISM.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**M**R. Lincoln Steffens is an author of keen observation. He has no ideological conceptions, or, rather, misconceptions, regarding the structure of modern American society to prevent him from discerning and establishing the mutual relations of political corruption and “business interests”. Nor is he possessed of connections that make it impossible for him to say



LINCOLN STEFFENS (1866-1936)

what it is that he observes, which he does in a courageous manner, which is devoid of useless rhetoric and frenzied emotionalism, but is, nevertheless, powerfully convincing. Mr. Steffens' latest production, is a magazine article on “Rhode Island: a State For Sale.” It is a presentation of the corrupt conditions that have produced the most powerful politician in this country, Senator Nelson W. Aldrich, “boss of the United States.”

“Bribery, bribery of the people,” says Mr. Steffens, “is a custom of the country in Rhode Island; it is an institution, and, like the church or property, it is not safe to attack.” Why? Because, as Mr. Steffens shows, to attack bribery is to attack the church and property, especially the latter. The manufacturers of Rhode Island have utilized the purchase of voters as a means to preserve and advance their own interests, as against those of the other classes of the state dependent on them.

Though Mr. Steffens' presentation makes plain to his Socialist readers the fact that private property, i.e., capitalist interests, are responsible for the immoral conditions in Rhode Island, he ignores the force of this fact in his own conclusions. Here ideology, which avails so little in dulling his observation, renders his powers of analysis and reason stupid indeed. Instead of calling into account the institution of

private property, which makes the debauchery of church and state essential to its conservation and advancement, he inveighs against the corruption of state functions in the interests of special privileges, and exalts the moral view of a Senator's duties, as against the practical view of business and politics. Such an illogical ignoring of the fact that material interests determine morality, instead of morality determining material interests, is a cart before the horse method that is bound to defeat its own purpose.

Mr. Steffens will have to cease being ideological in all respects, if he would be thoroughly sane and sound. His investigations have made plain to all his Socialist readers that Rhode Island is simply a microcosm of capitalism—a capitalist world in miniature, resting on an Atlas of corruption and private property. Moreover the Atlas of capitalism as science has removed the Atlas of mythology, i.e., by fearless analysis and reasoning in accordance with basic facts! Then will Socialism appear inevitable as the remedy for corruption, for then Society, being the owner of property, will not indulge in the absurdity of corrupting social functions in order to promote social interests; such a course will be eminently useless. Then will material interests and social morality harmonize. Then and only then will the moral view triumph over the practical view of business and politics, for then both will have disappeared in production and distribution by, of and for Society.

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

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