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EDITORIAL

“THEY DESERVE IT”—DO THEY?

By DANIEL DE LEON

IMAGINE an island out somewhere under the Southern stars, an island rich in rubies. Two hundred men land on it. Opportunities are equal to all. Independently of the others, each one stakes his claim and mines rubies. Some, by swifter, more skillful or more scientific mining, amass a larger pile than others. Some are slower, prefer to enjoy the tropical sights and sounds along with their work, and take frequent holidays; these have very small piles. All decide to go back home, these with their small bags of rubies, those with their large. No one of the two hundred has robbed, defrauded or fleeced another out of the proceeds of his industry. Do the possessors of the large bags deserve their greater wealth? Most assuredly they do.

Imagine the same island. Two hundred other men arrive on it, on a similar errand. But of these 200 men, 10 are more designing than the others. They have no intention of working if they can help it—they are “gentlemen.” They seize the firearms of their companions. Thus safeguarded they take possession not only of the ruby mines, but also of the provision supplies of the expedition. Then they say to the other 190: “Here you are foodless. We, being men of superior push, energy, and directing ability, are in possession of the eatables. Never mind how we got them, that was attended to by Providence. We also possess the inexhaustible mines of precious stones we all came here to work. Never mind how we got them, either. But we don’t intend to work these mines ourselves—bless you, no! Our work was done in accumulating them originally. But by making proper application to us, the captains of industry of this island, you may be allowed to work in the mines for us. Of every hundred rubies you dig out, eighty shall be ours, for we are cleverer than you and own the mines. The other twenty we shall return to you as your payment for working. With them you may purchase food from us, in order that you may live to

do more work. And if you don't like our terms—for this is a free island, and we don't attempt to coerce anyone—if you don't like our terms, you can select a convenient palm tree and go hang!” After a time, these two hundred men also decide to pack up and go home. But manifestly, the 10 captains of industry, those who “got up the scheme” and then called on the other 190 to work it, will have huge, plethoric, seam-bursting bags of jewels, while the 190 will have none or next to none. Do the possessors of the large bags in this case also deserve their greater wealth? Most assuredly they do NOT.

Nearly every workingman will agree with that. And yet in this very country of America he is being held in a vise and squeezed of the product of his labor by just such a group of men, who owe their title to the sources of wealth—the shops, railroads and mills as well as the mines—to methods as invalid in equity, though slightly different in style, as the 10 “clever” men of the ruby island. They no more “deserve” their \$1,000,000 incomes than the 10 “clever” men deserved their huge bags of red stones. As long as these few men are allowed to remain in possession of the sources of wealth the population of the United States is at their mercy as much as the 190 were in the South seas. These are the conditions the workingman speaks in favor of every time he casts a ballot for any party but the Socialist Labor Party. He recognizes that the parasites didn't “deserve it” in the one case; how many more panics and sieges of unemployment will he need before he recognizes it equally in the other, and sweeps them off his back?

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

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