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EDITORIAL

A DECENT BURIAL.

By DANIEL DE LEON

SCRATCH a member of a Committee of Any Number on Any Old Thing, and you have a gentleman who draws his income, his education, his refinement, from the exploitation of the working class, and hence is loath to see that exploitation ended. As slave to his conscience, when he has any, he lays the destitute condition of the workers to their “laziness, extravagance and intemperance.”

Into this genial ointment to the exploiter’s soul the Committee of One Hundred on National Health has unwittingly put a fly—a galling fly—by the publication of its Press Bulletin No. 28, just out, wherein the statement is made:

“His (the industrial insurance agent’s) visits, as a rule, are among a class of the population of whom a large part is industrious and frugal, but among whom also are many who require constant stimulation and incentive in providence and thrift.”

Even by this confession, a large part of the working class (no capitalist patronizes industrial insurance) is recognized to be “industrious and frugal.” As to the others, those alleged to “require constant stimulation and incentive to providence,” go talk four minutes with an insurance agent and learn what that stimulation consists in. Goading, not stimulation, is its name. The policy, that bit of paper by virtue of which one pays all his life for the privilege of dying, is held up to its holder as his most priceless possession. Golden visions of its virtues, lurid depictions of the horrors attendant upon its loss, are spread before him, according as he is easy or refractory. Should the balk be serious, an ultimatum to match the occasion is laid down by the skilful agent. The dread of the lapsed policy is made to cast its gloom over past, present and future. The result is, the policyholder is driven desperate, and his desperation is measured only by the love he bears those whom he

thinks to shield. In case of extremity medicine is denied the ill, bread is torn from the mouths of the hungry, and womanhood itself is bartered that the necessary quarter or dime be forthcoming and the policy be not lost. This last method of exaction is well known to and exploited by the companies. “You ought to have enough children of your own by this time to have a bigger book,” a Brooklyn superintendent is known to have said on one occasion, berating a bachelor agent for the smallness of his business.

This then, is the “stimulation” to which the industrial policyholder is subjected. And what does it lead to? The Committee’s Bulletin itself gives the answer within the next few lines: “...so that the burial, the impelling motive as a rule, for insurance, is a decent one and that the policy-holder shall not be put in a pauper’s grave.”

A system that robs its workers so that either by “industry and frugality,” or under “constant stimulation” (read goading—and such goading), all they can get out of a life-time of toil is a “decent funeral,” cannot endure. Moreover, the law of capitalism spells declining, not rising wages; there is no help under it; it must go. If the Committee of One Hundred accomplishes nothing else than this demonstration over its own signature of the impossibility of the industrial system it seeks to perpetuate, it will have done its work.

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

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