

EDITORIAL

THREE-FOURTHS BLIND MRS. PANKHURST.

By DANIEL DE LEON

OF the several thrilling episodes at the Brooklyn Academy of Music on the evening of the 17th of this month, when Mrs. Pankhurst spoke on the issue of woman suffrage, the most thrilling occurred when the distinguished British lady said:



SYLVIA PANKHURST (1882-1960)

“I went to your night court last night with some friends, and I think none of us slept very much after what we saw there. One case especially moved me. It was that of a young girl whose face bore no line indicative of an evil nature. She pleaded guilty to the charge against her.

“‘You admit, then,’ said the Judge, ‘that you lead this sort of life habitually?’

“‘Not all the time,’ replied the girl. ‘I work in a cigar factory. I only go on the street when I’m broke.’

“She went on to explain that she earned in the cigar factory \$3 a week. I ask you women what you would have done in her place? I don’t know that there is one of us who could say we wouldn’t have done as she has done.”

Upon the strength of all of which Mrs. Pankhurst appealed to the “good men” in her audience to grant political independence to woman.

That woman is entitled to the ballot, who has any valid argument to deny? That the ballot in woman’s hands would end the misery exemplified by the factory girl in that night court, is to look at the facts with one eye shut, and the other not quite open.

Manufacturers—whether of cigars or shoes, shirtwaists or matches, or any of any of the numerous trades that women are employed in—are not bachelors, nor bolts from a clear sky. They have mothers, wives and daughters, “cousins, sisters

and aunts.”

Know not these female relatives of the manufacturers the hard condition of their sisters in the factories, and as a consequence of the factory? They do, and proud and happy they are at the contrast with themselves.

Is it that they are harpies who delight in human torture? No; no more than their male relatives, at least not the majority of these.

These women, together with these men, are human. And they strikingly attest their humanity by the thick tissue of “justifications” that they laboriously weave out of the threads of their class interests.

The factory girl in that night court was a victim, not of “bad of men.” She is a victim of a social system by which some women, as well as some men, profit, and by which many men, as well as women, adults as well as children, are physically and morally harrowed. She is the victim of a class, the Capitalist Class, which is made up of at least as many women as men, she herself a member of a class, the Proletariat, made up of franchised manhood as well as disfranchised womanhood.

The ballot, without the knowledge to determine its use for the overthrow of the Capitalist Class—least of all the ballot, clogged as it is by the Votes For Women Movement with a tacit, if not the express, denial of the class struggle,—such a ballot as a healer of the social plague which breeds the wretchedness exemplified by the factory girl whom Mrs. Pankhurst used as a “specimen”—such a ballot is a caricature of the franchise. Its effect can be no better than a plaster on a wooden leg. Its prescription denotes the prescriber three-fourths blind to the symptoms of the disease.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
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slpns@slp.org