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EDITORIAL

SABOTAGE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

ALREADY on a previous occasion attention was called in these columns to the mischievous consequences of the misapplication of terms. A good thing, being designated with a bad term, often tends to cloak the bad that the bad term actually covers; and, inversely, a thing, being designated with a good name, tends to put under a cloud the good or innocent thing that is thus wrongly termed. The point was illustrated with a number of instances, at the head of the lot the instance of the New York *Evening Post's* using the term "to destroy life"—which is generally, and was at that particular time specifically understood as the act of the capitalist class in undermining, for profits, and even blotting out the lives of the workers—as the guiltless act of most everybody, due to general negligence in observing sanitary and precautionary measures. Walking over the bridge of that misuse of a term, the *Post* jauntily concluded that "if the capitalist is guilty of undermining and blotting out human lives, everybody else is guiltier, hence the capitalist is really guiltless."

Thanks to the slapdashedness of Sunday Supplement articles, and the desirability, in order to improve the market value of the same, to impart artness to them, there is grave danger of the public mind being accustomed to a mistakenly innocent meaning of the term "sabotage," and thereby promoting positive crime.

Fifty years hence, the term "sabotage" may find its place in some curious dictionary on "Terminologies of the Labor Movement." That time is not yet. Under such circumstances a term's meaning is determined by the history behind it—not by any isolated act so named, but by its regulation manifestations.

Keeping in mind the etymology, historical as well as grammatical, of the term "sabotage," together with its regulation manifestation, the latter will be found to be in close keeping with the former; and the two together appear as deeds of vindic-

tiveness—the vindictiveness often manifested, throughout the ages, by the weak towards their strong oppressors. The burning down of the nobility's chateaux by the Jacquerie, the peasantry of France being driven to insane revolt by the cumulated outrages perpetrated upon them; the hamstringing of the Barons' hunting steeds by the peasantry of Germany; the cutting down of telegraph posts by telegraphers, or the tearing up of rails by railroaders, or the use of emery by mill operatives, or the spoiling of the dough by bakers, etc., etc., etc., on strike,—these be but manifestations of the same psychology, adapted to different stages of society. All exhibit the vindictiveness of immature movements for the redress of social wrongs. They are various epochs of “sabotage.”

The wrongful act that may be extenuated by social unripeness, is not extenuatable when society has ripened to the point of setting on foot the corresponding Movement for redress. From that moment, acts of vindictiveness become crimes, senseless crimes. From that moment, such crimes become a hindrance to the Movement that would redress the very wrongs which the outburst of vindictiveness is blindly aimed against. From that moment, the slurring of the crime, either by applying whatever name it may be known by to acts, the comparative innocence of which lifts them out of the category of crime; or by extending the name of the crime so as to cover acts that have a legitimate place in War;—from that moment such use of terms is a misuse, fraught with serious consequences, not the least of which is the silent invitation it extends to the viciously inclined to step in, and indulge their bent.

It is so with the PRACTICE of the thing “sabotage” in our generation, when social ripeness has, not only pointed out, but actually forged the axe, the Movement, that plies the root of the existing social Wrongs. It is so also with the MISUSE of the term “sabotage.”

The Tower of Babel brought about the confusion of tongues. It is the part of every militant in the Labor or Socialist Movement to brace himself against confusion of terms, by insisting upon the most precise terminology possible.

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