

EDITORIAL

WILSON IN MOTION.

By DANIEL DE LEON

“IF a workman,” says the President-elect in his much commented-on article “The New Freedom” in the *World’s Work*, by way of illustrating the “heartlessness” of the “great economic system in which we are all caught,”—“if a workman is hurt by machinery which his superintendent directed him to use he cannot get damages because the courts have held that the superintendent is a fellow employee.” And the President-elect adds that “we have a right to expect that Judges will have their eyes open, even though the law which they administer hasn’t awakened.”

Whither is Woodrow Wilson headed? Where will he be at the end of the four-year-term of his incumbency as president?

The law, as it now stands, surely does not fit the facts. While the law stood still, the economic facts were steadily undergoing a change. When the law was originally enacted superintendents were not, generally, employees. They generally were the employers themselves, or members of the employing firm. Those were the days when the capitalist performed a social function. An order by the employer to his employee, directing him to use certain machinery, was an order from the fountain head of authority, and had to be obeyed, with the consequence that, if injury resulted, the employer was answerable in damages. By parity of reasoning, an order from a fellow employee never could lay the employer open to damages; the order was not a command that demanded obedience. But the facts have changed. The capitalist to-day performs no social function. From top to bottom “his” plant is operated by employees, the superintendent among these. The law being that the employee can not recover from injuries sustained through the wrongdoing of a fellow employee, it is obvious that, seeing the post of superintendence has fallen to employees, injuries resulting from the superintendent’s directions to his fellow employees entail no responsibility upon the employer.

This seems very simple and very logical. It is that no longer. Hand in hand with the change just sketched other changes have taken place, which put upon the matter a different aspect. The changes have for their effect an economic dependence of the proletarian mass that renders disobedience another term for starvation. The net result is that the post of superintendency, while it has been leveled to that employeeship, has acquired a defacto authority and power greater than that one time vested in the employing superintendent. Disobedience to him was not then suicidal. It is so now.

The law, as quoted by Woodrow Wilson, does not take cognizance of the change. Can mere law take the cognizance?

When Woodrow Wilson refers to present conditions as a “system,” a system “in which we are all caught,” the conclusion would seem justified that he realizes the evil is beyond the power of the soothing plaster Law, and demands the treatment of the surgeon. That means revolution.

When, however, Woodrow Wilson rebukes the Law for not yet having awakened, the conclusion from that would seem justified that he does expect the soothing plaster Law to answer the purpose.

The distinguished man whom the election returns have placed at the helm of the Ship of State is about to do things. In the doing of things he will either betray the fact that he is a mere sentimentalist who navigates the tempest-lashed social waters undirected by the chart of Science, and guided only by the will-o'-the-wisp flickerings of Sentiment,—in which case he will steer the Ship on the breakers; or he will slowly and diplomatically disclose the fact that he has stowed away Sentiment, carefully and safely under the hatches, and that he navigates by Chart,—in which case the Ship will be headed towards the Socialist Republic.

With Woodrow Wilson in motion, whatever direction the helm in his hand turn the Ship's nose to, the duty laid upon the Socialist Labor Party compels increased alertness. Either the alertness that overcasts the mariner's face in sight of squalls that call for “weather” coats; or the alertness that brightens the mariner's face in sight of the wished-for land that calls for “bunting” wherewith gaily to rig the riggings in gala.

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