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EDITORIAL

“NEUTRALITY.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

THERE was in ancient Athens an old law that decreed severe punishment upon any citizen who remained neutral in the conflicts within the state. The reason for the law was a feature of human nature that has not changed to this day, and never will. The citizen who wraps himself in “Neutrality” when internal conflict rages is a coward: cowards, like thieves, are liars. Accordingly, the Greek legislator’s eye penetrated the cloak of “Neutrality.” He saw within it a being who was like a rock under the immediate surface of the water—a source of danger, all the greater because concealed. The “neutral” would be found to be the vilest of partisans in practice. Open partisanship, however violent, can never match the mischief that concealed partisanship will perpetrate. Upon this fact and reasoning the Athenian law against “neutrals” was planted. The law was wise: the reason therefor is a living fact.

Far away, in distant Russia, the tiger Trepoff recently sought to wash his hands of the blood shed in Bialystok by saying he had kept “neutral.” Here in America the capitalist Government pronounces itself “impartial” in the conflicts between the Working Class and the Capitalist Class. The “impartiality” of the one, the “neutrality” of the other hardly need comment. When a military chief remains “neutral” at a time when his subalterns are rioting in massacre, his neutrality is the kind of devilry that the Athenian law sought to prevent; when a Government legislates in such manner that one class is enabled to ride another, and that the armed force is ever ready to back up the rider, then the “impartiality” that such a Government affects is the social stab in the back that the Athenian law sought to parry with its legislation against “Neutrality.”

Clear as the Wisdom of the old Athenian legislator appears from these illustrations, there is a third illustration, that places his wisdom in still stronger

light. It is the posture of “Neutrality” towards the Trades Unions affected by the pure and simple political Socialist. No “neutral” Trepoff during the Bialystok massacres, no “impartial” capitalist Government hurling troops against workingmen on strike, in the conflicts between capital and Labor, exemplifies more glaringly the impossibility of “Neutrality” during internal conflicts, or the scoundrelism of its affectation, or what “Neutrality” actually means. He who moves in a certain sphere cannot ignore his surroundings. The sphere of Socialism is the Labor Movement. To attempt to ignore the happenings in the Movement is like attempting to keep one’s head above deep water without paddling with his hands. The thing being impossible, even if at first honestly contemplated, the pretense of carrying it out, is a Trepoff and capitalist Government combination of felonious hypocrisy. Accordingly, the pure and simple political Socialist becomes the vilest partisan of treason to the Working Class. Theoretically he must be that: experience confirms the theory. From forgery and slander, down or up to bribery and being bribed, the pure and simple political Socialist, or “Neutral” in the conflicts of the economic movement, sticks at no act of baseness in behalf of the side of his love. In this instance, as in so many others, like lover, like loved.

The “Neutral” is a coward: manliness knows no “Neutrality.” The “Neutral” is a snake in the grass: characterfulness spurns “Neutrality.” The “Neutral” is an imposter: truthfulness abhors “Neutrality.” The “Neutral” is a trifler: serious men are too much in earnest for “Neutrality.”

Not “Neutrality” but decided “Partisanship” does the Movement demand, which has set its cap to the overthrow of the rule typified in Russia by a “neutral” Trepoff, in capitalist America by “impartial” capitalist Government, and whose outposts are, in Russia, the Gapons, in America, the Gomperses.

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