

EDITORIAL

“SCATTERED RESPONSIBILITY.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

LAST February there was a train wreck at Woodlawn in which twenty-four passengers lost their lives. Albert H. Smith, the Vice-President and General Manager of the New York Central lines east of Buffalo, was charged with manslaughter in the third degree. On the 18th of this month the trial took place in this city before Justice Kellog, sitting in the Criminal Branch of the Supreme Court. So soon as the prosecution and defence rested, Justice Kellog directed the jury to bring in a verdict of acquittal for the defendant. The direction was obeyed without the jury's leaving their seats. Vice-President Smith is again at large.

The argument of counsel for the defence merits attention—“scattered responsibility.” In a nutshell, the point was this: The responsibility for running the trains is shared by so many people that—each should bear his share? No!—that the Vice-President and General Manager should be held free of all responsibility.

The theory upon which Mr. Albert H. Smith goes off scot-free suggests two considerations:

First, if a Vice-President and stockholder, who is decked with the title and presumably the duties of General Manager, to say nothing of the salary to match,—if such an official bears no responsibility, or so slight a responsibility that he can not be held,—if that is the case with a Vice-President, how much more utterly irresponsible must not the President, the Directors, and the stockholders be? Where there is no responsibility there can be no work. Consequently, the whole pack of officials, with high sounding titles implying work, are only sponges.

Secondly, seeing that with great frequency the wage slaves engaged at actually running the roads are hauled up and punished for accidents, it follows that **THEY** bear the full responsibility. Where there is responsibility there is work; where there

is full responsibility there must be full work. Consequently, all the work that is real work—not the nerve-racking intrigues of Directors against one another, and of all of them together in legislatures and courts against the people,—is done by the wage-slaves only.

So says Socialism. As an economic or sociologic theory, the principle is denied by capitalism. As a practical fact, the courts of capitalism confirm, uphold and vindicate the principle.

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Uploaded November 2009

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