

EDITORIAL

A GOOD INVESTMENT? RATHER, A BAD ONE!

By DANIEL DE LEON

“THE money spent in beating this strike is the best investment we ever made.” Thus spake Belvedere Brooks, superintendent of the Western Union.

Of everything said of the great battle now being fought out, it is not at all unlikely that Brooks’ remark is about the most foolish. For years one of the most depressing features of the labor movement was the claim of certain elements of our class to “aristocracy.” By reason of being a little better situated, receiving a higher rate of pay or working under not quite the worst conditions, certain detachments of the army of labor held aloof from their fellows—as some do so yet, for that matter!—the consequence being that, at all times, and especially in periods of struggle, capitalism had allies whose long arm reached down into the very vitals of the body of the working class.

What the result was no Socialist needs to be told. Labor, as Haywood said in the first convention of the I.W.W., was never beaten by capital, but always by labor itself. Disunion, the idea that one man was better than another, both being members of the same class; that there was such a thing as an “aristocracy of labor”; that each detachment should look out for its own interests and ignore the others—these things, and others of like kind, invariably brought disaster to our class. Through the false notions disseminated and carefully cultivated by the elements interested in keeping us in servitude, the working class was rendered helpless in the face of the enemy.

But a light has broken through the clouds, and for this we have to thank, in no small measure, Belvedere Brooks and others of his type. The workingman who understands the position of his class dreads the capitalist most when he comes to us

wearing an air of friendship. When the mask is thrown aside and capitalism in all its hideousness shows its face, we realize that we have taken a step forward. A few years, yes, a few months ago, it would have been hard to talk revolution to the telegraphers. They knew then, or thought they knew, that capital and labor are brothers, that there is an identity of interest between master and man.

They know better now, and to this end Belvedere Brooks has contributed in no small degree. So far from the money spent by the Western Union in attempting to beat the strikers being the best investment it ever made, it is the worst. Brooks might better have taken the money and thrown it into the bay. For one thing, the telegraphers see now as they never saw before, that, instead of being aristocrats of the labor world and their organization fitted to meet the master class in a death struggle, they are, after all, but members of the working class, with interests identical with the workers wherever found, and that the present form of organization is not what it is cracked up to be.

“A good investment”—money spent by the capitalist in bringing out as never before the spirit of the revolution? For them, no! For us, yes! Never again will the telegraphers go back to poor, decrepit, hide-bound craft unionism. Never again will such a man as Small be given first place in the organization. From the spirit displayed of late it is not too much to expect that this branch of the working class may seriously take up the question of Industrial Unionism, and when they who have held aloof from the body of the workers shall have done so, when they shall have taken by the hand the lowliest member of our class and hailed him as “Comrade,” Small and Brooks, in common with all who betray and tyrannize labor, will be reduced to the brutal necessity of doing something useful for a living.

The fact is, Small is there already. He, but a day or two ago, announced his intention of hunting a job. Of course, it is enough to make angels weep to see him dashed from a high estate to a place in the ranks of the proletariat, and the angels will do some more weeping when Brooks is reduced to the condition of the man who tried so hard to help him.

One thing becomes more apparent every day. It is not the powers of capitalism which bind our class in chains. As is seen by Brooks’ blether in what he regards as the hour of victory, capitalism is short-sighted. It sees not a day ahead. Under its

rule, society is going to pieces in a riot of rottenness and ignorance, and, with a united, determined, enlightened working class, we have little or nothing to fear from it.

What is it, then, that holds us? Thomas B. Reed declared that man's greatest achievement is the conquest of fear. Prior to that man remained for untold generations little or nothing above the level of animal. That accomplished fully, there is no height unattainable.

Let us complete the victory. It is within our grasp. Let the worker rise from the dust in which he wallows at a word from him whom he regards as master. Let him conquer the fear which binds the mind in chains, and on the day when that should have been accomplished, Small, the traitor, Brooks, the tyrant, and all their detestable brood will have reached the end of the tether.

Let Mr. Brooks look into the future and look well, while he is about it; and, as he looks, let him think, if he is capable of doing so. He may then question the merits of the investment made in fighting the telegraphers. And if he doesn't, the effect will be just the same. Instead of being the best, money spent in bringing out the fighting spirit in a powerful detachment of our class, one the influence of which is indispensable in the struggle about to break out around and about us, in dispelling the clouds which have enveloped their minds and putting courage into their hearts, is the worst kind of an investment for the class for which Brooks speaks.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
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