

EDITORIAL

THE CLOVEN HOOF OF PROHIBITIONISM.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE Prohibitionist platform opens with an invocation to the Creator. That sounds quite pious. But before one reaches the end of the document something exactly the opposite of pious, in fact, a cloven hoof, is run up against. Towards the end of the Prohibitionist platform this plank occurs among the demands, or promises made:

“An equitable and constitutional employers’ liability law.”

“What!”, one hears the pious Prohibitionist exclaim; “would thee have an UNequitable, an UNconstitutional employers’ liability law?”

There is no such qualifying word as “equitable” or “constitutional” placed before the Prohibitionist demand for the closing of the warehouses or saloons in which alcoholic liquors are sold; or before the Prohibition demand for the boarding up of the establishments in which alcoholic liquors are manufactured; nor yet before the Prohibition demand for blocking the exportation, importation or transportation of alcoholic liquors. These demands are made without the qualifying word that they shall be “equitable”; nor are the demands clogged by constitutional qualms.

Prohibitionism justly and unerringly concludes (from its premises, which hold alcoholic liquor to be a nuisance), that the nuisance must be abated without further ado. If a thing is a nuisance its continuance is contrary to public policy. There is no such thing as an “UNequitable” treatment of a nuisance: a nuisance should be treated in only one way—with utter disregard for its comfort, or “equities”, of which it is not supposed to have any. Nor is it supposable that a nuisance can be sheltered under a single feather of the Constitutional wing: in point of “Constitution”, a nuisance is an outlaw. Nothing, accordingly, is more legitimate—if the manufacture, sale, exportation, importation and transportation of alcoholic liquors

for beverage is held to be a nuisance—than that the practices be torn up, branch and root, and to proceed upon the principle that to do so, so far from possibly violating the Constitution, has the sanction, backing and encouragement of the Constitution itself.

For the identical reasons, indeed, much more so, an employers' liability law can under no imaginable circumstances be tainted with UNequitableness, or can it be supposed to be UNconstitutional. The Constitution expressly declares that its purpose is "to establish justice" and "promote the general welfare." A social system under which a single citizen (let alone the large majority of the people, as happens under the present system of capitalism) can find himself, without any fault of his own, in such a state of wretchedness as to be forced to sell himself in wage-slavery to a wage-slave-holder, called "employer"—such a social system does violence to the purpose of the Constitution; under such a social system employership is a nuisance; and the least that both Equity and the Constitution demand is that the employer be prevented from taking greater advantage of his wage-slave than to plunder him: the neglect of the employer to protect the limbs and life of his wage-slave is a nuisance that eclipses all that Prohibitionism claims for the nuisance of alcoholic liquors. No employers' liability law can be too drastic, or too sweeping. The very idea of an employers' liability law being "UNequitable" or "UNconstitutional" is preposterous, and in direct contradiction to the juridic reasoning upon which Prohibitionism is soundly planted.

Whence, then, the difference of posture assumed by Prohibitionism? Why does Prohibitionism, grapple ruthlessly with what it considers a nuisance, and go about gingerly in the treatment of an even worse nuisance?

The plank in question exposes the cloven hoof of the professional Prohibitionist. Seventy-five per cent of the gentlemen who assembled as delegates to the Prohibition convention at Columbus were employers; ninety-nine per cent of the Prohibitionist national and State officers are beneficiaries of employership—some even high officials in Trusts. Any one of these leading Prohibitionists is directly responsible for more drunkenness—the foolish yet well established asylum of the poverty that employership steeps the masses in—than a score of distilleries, or a hundred saloons.

No wonder these gentlemen prate of “equitable” employers’ liability laws—no employers’ liability law is equitable to the plunderer of the workingmen.

No wonder these gentlemen twaddle about “constitutional” employers’ liability laws—nothing is ever constitutional that pares the fangs of any limb of a ruling class.

Not the Creator should Prohibitionists, in prayer meetings or conventions assembled, invoke. Their tutelary deity is the cloven hoofed Old Nick.

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