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EDITORIAL

THE PARAMOUNT ISSUE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE nomination of Preston for President of the Nation by the Socialist Labor Party is the most telling stroke dealt, at this critical hour in the Labor Movement, in behalf of the integrity of Unionism.

Though often told, the story of Preston should be here summarized.

Preston was doing picket duty for his Union against the restaurant of Silva, in the mining camp of Goldfield. It is only an aggravation of Silva's offence and an accentuation of Preston's manhood, that the strike or boycott was due to Silva's outrageous conduct towards a woman employe. This feature of the case must be left aside, for a moment, as tending to "promote sympathy" at the possible expense of sound thought. The successfulness of Preston's vigilance enraged Silva. The fellow rushed out of his restaurant with a gun and pointed its muzzle close to Preston's face. If a burglar is discovered, the occupier of the house may shoot him down. The act is legal because it checks a man bent on crime, and bent on a crime that, itself, will be presumably backed by murder. Only in such a case is the use of a deadly weapon permissible; and in such a case if the burglar kills his assailant he is guilty of murder. In all other instances, the man assailed with a deadly weapon is justified to return in kind. This is universal law, justice, and common sense. Silva assailed Preston with a deadly weapon, whereupon Preston shot him dead. Whether Preston is guilty or not turns, therefore, entirely upon the point whether Preston was engaged in a criminal act when assaulted by Silva; and this, in turn, brings up the question of the rightfulness or wrongfulness of picket duty.

The point may be made concretely—if Preston is justly in the penitentiary, then picket work at a strike or boycott is a criminal offence.

The unions, or economic organizations of Labor do not all proceed from the same premises, and, consequently, do not all aim at the same goal. Some, the so-

called conservative Unions, proceed from the premises of the "Brotherhood of Capital and Labor," and they merely aim at the establishment of "harmonious relations" between the two alleged brothers. Others, the class-conscious Unions, proceed from the correct premises that, between the capitalist class and the working class, there is an irrepressible conflict, and these Unions aim at the ultimate overthrow of the capitalist or wage slave system of production. Despite this marked difference between the two sets of Unions, there is one thing upon which both are agreed, and that is the necessity of the strike or the boycott as a weapon against the capitalist employer. The one set may look for permanent and satisfactory relations through the strike and boycott; the other set may know better, and look to the strike and boycott as only a means for temporary redress and protection. Both sets, however, cling to the strike and boycott as necessary weapons. Indeed, strip the Union of the strike and boycott weapon, and the Union might as well disband.

Any act that places picketing on a par with burglary, or other such felonious acts, knocks the bottom from under the Union. The boycotted employer could then with impunity aim a gun at a picket-man; if the picket-man dared even as much as knock the gun from his assailant's hands he would be guilty of assault and battery; there would be nothing for him to do but run for safety—and that would mean the disarming of the Union, which in turn spells its death.

Preston, tried and now in the penitentiary for having slain an assailant who threatened his life on the ground that he was doing picket duty, was tried and sentenced, not for killing, but FOR PICKETING.

Preston in the penitentiary is a capitalist flank movement to scuttle the Union.

Preston in the penitentiary is a capitalist move to place picketing on the list of criminal offences, and to do so by a backstairs manoeuvre.

Many a battle upon which issues of great pith and moment hung, began in a skirmish for some important post. The issue between Capitalist Usurpation and Labor's Emancipation is boiled down in this campaign to the concrete issue, Shall Martin R. Preston remain in the penitentiary, or shall he be freed?

Capitalism justly calls upon all capitalist interests to keep him there. Socialism justly calls upon the working class, upon Union men of all complexions, to unbolt his prison cell.

The Presidential ticket of the Socialist Labor Party presents to the Socialists and Working Class the only practical issue of the hour, the only issue of immediate importance and solution, the only ballot that is not noise without substance.

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

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