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EDITORIAL

CALL YE NOT THIS ALSO A CASE?

By DANIEL DE LEON

A HUNDRED and thirty years ago there was fought out on this soil a conflict which gave a nation freedom from foreign despotism. Down the ages, as long as history is read or written, the fame of that struggle will go ringing. Its renown is nobly merited. Yet strange to say, it is often the loudest declaimers of the glories of Revolutionary days who are strongest arrayed against the oncoming conflict, that which will establish Socialism on the ruins of competitive production, the same as its predecessor a century and a quarter ago established American independence on the ruins of feudal sovereignty.

“What!” the argument runs, “What is there to fight for now? We are independent, no one oppresses us, the foreign tyrant is no more, and every man can hew out his own fortune. A revolution in ’76 was necessary and alright: now it would be unnecessary and all wrong.”

Would it, though? A comparison of the issues involved then and now may help to answer the question.

In the first place, are we free and independent? The foreign oppressor, in the meaning of King George’s time, is gone, it is true. But on our own shores, within our own family, as it were, has grown up a despotism a hundred times more rigorous than ever the Georges tried to wield. Abstract rights, in the statute books, we have. But within those same liberal statutes, designed to overthrow political domination, has grown up an economic oppression, not contemplated by or guarded against by those statutes, which swings its mighty sceptre with greater weight than ever the subjects of the Georges felt.

To illustrate: The Georges tried to restrict American manufacturing to certain articles, and then only on condition of certain payments for the right. To-day, the capitalist owner of the tools restricts the right to manufacture of millions of workers, allowing them to produce only if they give him four-fifths of their product

as his profits.

The Georges tried to exact a trifling tax on tea, window-glass, and a few other commodities. To-day, by the monopolizing of industry, the masters of economic power can fleece the people again as consumers, piling on the price to the breaking point—witness just now the Beef Trust, the Ice Trust, and the Consolidated Gas Co.

The Georges reigned over a scattering million of people. Even had the Hanoverian tyranny gone its furthest, the virgin forest, rich with opportunity, lay behind the settlers. They could have moved back, developed and become prosperous in spite of the hand across the water. To-day, the lords of creation, the Iron Kings, Sugar Kings, the Railroad Kings and their tribe, reign in fact over a populace of eighty full million, and growing yearly; to whom, moreover, all natural opportunity has long since been cut off.

The Georges exercised their tyranny over a narrow strip of land along the Atlantic coast. Their descendants, the barons of American production, carry things with a high hand over a domain that reaches from ocean to ocean, from the Gulf to the Great Lakes, and is now being pushed Asia-ward, across the Pacific islands and the Philippines. In the words of England's boast, they can say "We hold a greater Empire than has been."

Can one declare, then, that whereas a Revolution to overthrow the stuffy old drones of the German hive was legitimate, a Revolution to-day, to overthrow the home-bred article, is impious? In the light of their greater power, extending even to the life and death of our people, as is seen now in the times of the panic; in the light of the greater territorial expanse of their dominion; in the light of every comparison that can be drawn between the self-reliant, self-sufficient status of the Americans in '76 and the helpless, ground-down condition of the populations in 1908, one can not but agree that if the Revolution which gave us political freedom were justified, that which will give us economic freedom is doubly so. If the war of '76 was fought for a cause, call ye not this also a Cause?

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