

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 9, NO. 265.

NEW YORK, MONDAY, MARCH 22, 1909.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

THE EMPEROR HAS NO CLOTHES.

By DANIEL DE LEON

EVERYONE remembers that keen story of Hans Christian Andersen's, in which a self-satisfied ruler takes off one garment after another, and then believing himself most gorgeously clad in mystical raiment, struts forth in parade, until one little innocent cries out "Why, the emperor has no clothes on!"

Like emperors, which embody and epitomize their systems, may be systems themselves. For two centuries the Old Regime in France kept at the task of disrobing itself, casting off successively the garments of honor, nobility, humanity, etc., it had in its early days striven to wrap itself in, till at last the people cried "Why, the Old Regime has no clothes on!" and abolished the Old Regime.

At this present day another system, in another land, America, is going through the identical process.

One garment it had, that of justice and equity. But the evidences of class rule and class discrimination became too manifest to be denied. It was even seen that the worker received less than one-quarter of his product. Off came the coat of justice and equity.

Bountiful this system claimed to be. Then developed the chronic unemployed problem, thousands dying of tuberculosis caused by underfeeding, whole families committing suicide because they could not get food, a virtual famine in the land, although there was plenty in the storehouses. Off came the vest of bountifulness.

Humane did this system pretend to be. But those who looked with eyes to see beheld lisping children driven to work in mill and mine, adult men and women exploited to the last limits of human endurance, pitiless speeding up and pitiless disregard for them when worked out being the badge of their servitude. Off came the system's shirt of humanity.

One last garment it clung to, long and desperately clung to—its

unmentionables, which it called law-abidingness. Then issued government reports of meat packing, canned goods poisoning, western land frauds, eastern bank scuttling, middle-western capitol grafting, New York policy-holder robbing, San Francisco dive-keeper preying, Panama Canal scandals, Tennessee Coal and Iron Co. absorptions—till at last there was not a law on the statute books of the land through which a coach and four had not been driven. Off came the trousers of law-abidingness.

Naked now stands the system, its last shreds of assumed respectability discarded, its last excuses for enduring thrown to the winds.

The system of capitalism “has no clothes on.” Soon will the workers recognize it for what it is, and bury it.

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

Uploaded July 2010

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