

EDITORIAL

THE TRAVIS-ROBINSON BILL.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE bill that bears the name of Travis-Robinson, and has just been signed by the Governor of this State, is described as a bill for the construction of subways in this city “the expense to be assessed upon the territory opened, or by private capital alone.”

The description may describe the wording of the bill correctly; at the same time the description is misleading. Whether the expense of construction is raised by assessment upon the territory opened, or by private capital, it is private capital that will build and own the subway, and, consequently, will exploit the undertaking to private uses.

It sounds quite democratic, even revolutionary, to assess the territory opened.” There is nothing in it. The territory opened is private property—property owned by real estate holders. The price—commonly, but mistakenly, called the value of the land—translates itself into rent, and rent is a social product. Transportation facilities render accessible territory otherwise inaccessible, or difficult of access. This raises the price of the land in question; the raised price goes into the pockets of the landlord in the shape of rent. Who pays the price? Of course, the tenant, and he is the identical being who will have to pay the fare on transportation facilities that are created. Pursuing the question further it will be found that transportation facilities, even if paid for out of the increased price of the territory opened, partake of all the features that are essential to private undertakings for private profit, in other words, of private capital:

First, the transportation facility must itself pay for itself;

Secondly, the way the transportation facility is made to pay for itself is by reducing expenses to the minimum—another way of saying that expenses must come out of the hide of the wage slaves who operate it; otherwise the increased price

of the territory opened will remain in abeyance;

Third, the assessment paid by the owners of the territory opened is but an investment which enables them to derive a revenue from property otherwise unprofitable, or a larger revenue from property that yielded less profit.

The moral of the Travis-Robinson Bill story is here for Whig or Tory—

As impossible as, in geometry, is the problem of the quadrature of the circle, is, in economics and under capitalism, the problem of ascertaining where “private capital” ends and “private land” commences, or vice versa. Land and the instruments of production are so inextricably needed for production that the effects of their private ownership merge into one. However legislatures may juggle with terms, the private ownership of the two inanimate necessities for production, land and machinery, has fatedly the effect of exploitation upon the proletariat.

The real “Travis-Robinson Bill” is yet to be enacted. Its enactment awaits the day when, both the land and the machinery of production being owned by the industrially organized people of the land, the social creature called “Rent” will vanish by being directly absorbed by the people—the day when “transportation facilities” will not have for their effect the swelling of landlords’ pockets, and private landlords’ interests will not have for their effect the capitalist effect of grinding down Labor. In short, the real “Travis-Robinson Bill” awaits for its enactment the day when free social opportunities, planted upon a free soil, will be guaranteed by the Sword and Shield of the Socialist Republic.

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

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