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EDITORIAL

PLEASE ENLIGHTEN US, GENTLEMEN AND LADIES!

By DANIEL DE LEON

AMONG the washed and upper circles of modern society, especially among the “refined” element and their press, there is a strong inclination to dismiss Socialism, as too coarse and blackguard for consideration.

To the writer of these lines a conversation was reported during the last week of the late campaign in which a number of gentlemen and two ladies participated. All the gentlemen were “men of education”; most of them pursued professional careers; the ladies matched their male company in “elegance of breeding.” With the exception of the one who reported the occurrence and who “lay low” during the discussion, the gentlemen were all for Bannard and pronounced anti-Tammany. Tammany, they held, was an “organization of thieves to rob the city.” They rang the changes {charges?} on these views, the ladies agreeing, with no more and no less vehemence, however, than did the *Evening Post*, their journalistic patron saint and other papers which they quoted. The conversation then drifted over to Socialism. “Shocking!” came from the ladies; “blackguard and coarse!” came from the gentlemen. Of course the matter was not gone into very deeply. The substance of the justification for the exclamations was that “Socialists have no breeding: ‘thief!’ ‘robber!’ are ever ready on their lips against their adversaries: they are blackguards, simply blackguards.”

It would be interesting to have these gentlemen and ladies, who roundly use, and whose press roundly uses, the words “thief!” “robber!” towards Tammany, explain why the use of the identical words by Socialists, becomes “coarseness” and “blackguardism.” If upon the lips of these ladies and gentlemen, and in the columns of their papers, the words are “proper” why are they “improper” on the lips of Socialists?

Can it be that these ladies and gentlemen will answer saying: “The blackguardism and coarseness of the words lies in their being applied to us: we are not thieves and robbers: Tammany is.” ’Tis to be hoped the gentlemen and ladies in question will not make so blundering a dodge. If the Tammany people are thieves and robbers, how comes it the Murphys are at large, and no “intrepid Jerome” has yet landed them in the penitentiary, never even made the effort to land them?

And can it be that these gentlemen and ladies would reply to this, saying: “Well, the Murphys are not robbers and thieves according to the criminal code; but they are according to the moral code.” ’Tis also to be hoped that our gentlemen and ladies will not seek escape by that still more blundering dodge. If the moral code renders proper the use of the words “thief!” “robber!” towards Tammany, by what right deny “propriety” to the Socialists’ conduct in applying the identical words to the capitalist class, whom Socialists prove to be the appropriators, through methods that the criminal code also does not cover, of the wealth produced by the working class?

While our gentlemen and ladies are thinking how to get out of that hole, another question may be put to them: “Does not the ‘blackguardism’ and ‘coarseness’ of Socialists consist in telling the truth, and then aggravating the offence by proving it?”

Won’t these ladies and gentlemen, incidentally their press also, enlighten us?

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