

EDITORIAL

ARBITRATION.

By DANIEL DE LEON

FROM Wittenberg College, Springfield, O., comes the request for an expression of the attitude of the Socialist Labor Party in regard to compulsory arbitration.

Arbitration—meaning, of course, the composing of controversies between capitalists and workingmen—is, when “free,” ineffective; when “compulsory,” tyrannical and, consequently, also, in the long run, ineffective.

The term “arbitration,” like the term contract,” is technical. They presuppose peership, equality; they also presuppose a common ground upon which the interested parties can stand. There is no such equality between capitalist and workingman, no common ground upon which both can stand.

In the social system under which the capitalist is a fact, the workingman is a chattel, held in the servitude of wage slavery. “Arbitration” between slaveholder and slave is a misnomer. Either the slave is a finality, and then he is below “arbitration”; or he is not a finality, and then he is above “arbitration.”

Applying these fundamental premises to the question propounded:

1st. The slave who is a finality will not need being “arbitrated” about: he is a crushed man;

2nd. The slave who is not a finality, to wit, the working class, will reject “arbitration” as a farce and an insult. For one thing, his slavery status deprives him of the power to enforce a favorable award; for another thing, when he has the power to enforce an award he will also have the power to break his chains: he will not use the power for less.

3rd. The slavery of the working class not being a finality, compulsory arbitration is but a veiled attempt to render the present status of wage slavery permanent. The tyrannical method, always suicidal, is in this instance particularly

ineffective. Capitalism can not drop the false pretence of “free labor” without committing suicide.

There is nothing to “arbitrate” between capitalist and workman—unless it be in the Shakespearean sense that

thoughts speculative their unsure
hope relate,
But certain issue strokes must arbitrate.¹

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
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¹ [William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act 5, Scene 4—*R.B.*]