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EDITORIAL

THE WAGES OF “GOOD NATURE.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

LAST Friday evening, a crowded ferry-boat was sunk just off the wharf on the way to Staten Island. There were 1,200 passengers on board, homeward bound. In the accident some were killed, others severely hurt, and all went through agonies that are easier imagined than described. That the thing superficially called the “greed of corporations” was responsible for the tragedy, goes without saying. Apart from negligence in this particular instance, there was the direct crime of commission by packing such a mass of humanity into such boats. But does the blame wholly lie with the corporation? Is not “The Public” guilty, at least, of contributory negligence? Nay, is it not, upon closer inquiry, an accessory?

What is called the “Good Nature” of American “Publics” verges upon a criminal negligence, that invites disasters by tolerating and thereby encouraging the “greed of corporations.”

There is hardly a public conveyance in Greater New York that can be said to be safe; surely none connected with the many main arteries of traffic. The way passengers allow themselves to be packed, not only invites disaster, but insures it in cases of even inevitable or trifling accidents. With all the seats—themselves sufficiently close—occupied by human freight, the passage ways are allowed to be choked till the conveyance becomes a lump of intertwined flesh and bones. At best, discomfort reigns. And yet the thing is tolerated. Not infrequently peals of laughter punctuate the continuous trying attitudes into which the passengers are thrust. This is called “Good Nature.” Last Friday’s disaster furnishes the commentary on the term.

When the temper, styled “Good Nature,” is a manifestation of levity, then the correcter term for it is “Sheepishness.” And the people who indulge in that are ever treated like sheep. It may be soothing to give a good name to a weakness. But soothing syrups are no eradicators of disease. Large chunks of the discomforts that afflict the people are removable to-day. But they are not removable by legislation. They are removable only by a public spirit that excludes “Sheepishness,” yclept

“Good Nature.” The temper that tolerates the overcrowding of public conveyances adds wings to the capitalist vulture, and these wings not infrequently flap mourning into the homes of the people.

A characterful “Public” may still lack the intellectual development to rise to the requisite height of uprooting the capitalist Upas tree. But such a “Public” would furnish a base of moral strength on which to build. What with the youngness of the country and the “vertigo of work” our people are seized with, that base of moral strength is yet extensively absent. It is not the planting of the Socialist seed alone that to-day constitutes the task of the S.L.P. It must also plow the ground, spade and rake it; it must fertilize the ground with the high moral spirit of Socialism. It must do that, lest the weeds choke the fruit.

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