

EDITORIAL

THE CHRISTMAS HEATHEN CHINEE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE “Consumers’ League”—an association of Labor-fleeing philanthropists—, and John Wanamaker—a “philanthropist” of Labor-fleeing associations—are glowering at each other over the green table of modern society. Their game is not Euchre, but it is a game all the same. It is the game of “Skin and Look Holy.” But the



JOHN WANAMAKER (1838–1922)

look that Bill Nye gave to Ah Sin when the latter put down a right bower, which the same Nye had dealt to his partner, may give an idea, though faint, of the look that the “Consumers’ Association” is just now bestowing on John Wanamaker at this gentleman’s latest card.

The “Consumers’ League” wants to introduce better conditions for shop girls, so it says. Does the “Consumers’ League” help or at all seek to remove the conditions of which the shop girls’ state is but a result? Not at all. If the “Consumers’ League” did that, the bevy of bloated beatitudes that composes it would have no leisure to play at philanthropy. They are stock-holders, directly or indirectly, in corporations, which is to say that they are beneficiaries of unpaid wages plundered from the working class. The breadwinners of their families being robbed, the girls become shop girls, and are treated accordingly.

Now, this “Consumers’ League,” a genuine imitation Bill Nye of Bret Harte’s immortal poem, proposed to itself some fun at the expense of John Wanamaker, who in turn approved himself an improved Ah Sin, beating his adversary at his own game. The “Consumers’ League” demanded that the stores close early so as not to put so “inhuman

a strain” upon the shop girls in this holidays season. That certainly, coming from a “Consumers’ League,” was but a card taken from a pack that was “stacked, and the same with intent to deceive.”

Then John had his inning, and it must be confessed that “the hand that is played by this heathen Chinee, and the point that he makes is quite frightful to see.” The left bower he lays down is the “request of his own employees” not to close early (why, of course, in their misery they will make any request their employer may hint at); he follows this up with the ace that “his employees get ample compensation, \$16,000 more for overtime (what capitalist, “Consumers’ Leaguers’” included, don’t squander wealth upon their employees, or are slow in giving figures, provided they are not compelled to show their books? Aren’t the coal barons doing that very thing now?); and finally he takes in the trick and clears the deck with the right bower of “The Public,”—“‘The Public,’ he declares, “demands late closing, ‘The Public’ can not make its purchases early, ‘The Public’ must be protected.”

Bill Nye’s “Can this be?” at sight of the way that Ah Sin played it on him, is surely not in it, with the “Can this be?” that the “Consumers’ League” is certainly groaning out at sight of the way that Holy John turned the tables on it:—

Which is why we remark,
And our language is plain,
That for ways that are dark,
And for tricks that are vain,
The Labor-Fleecer is peculiar,—
Which the same we are free to maintain.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded October 2006