

Ave, Eliot, Liberator!

By Daniel De Leon

“Private and Public Liberty!”

“Freedom of Contract!”

These were the blood-tingling exhortations that punctuated President Eliot’s recent speech before the Economic Club of Boston. Of course, he was applauded to the echo by the enraptured employers present. Whose heart would not respond to the call of freedom, all the more seeing the steady approach of socialism, or what Spencer termed “The Approaching Slavery”? And shall a gathering of rotund and spongy employers, panting after more rotundity and more sponginess, be thought to be possessed of less responsive hearts, perchance no heart whatever?

“Freedom of contract” is a term of equity. It is weighty with meaning, sense and justice. According thereto a contract is not valid if the contracting parties are not absolutely free to enter into it, or refuse. A contract is even considered immoral, as against public policy, if entered into under duress. “Freedom of contract” means all this. But now, a perverse mob, leavened with the perverser leaven of socialism, is setting up its many-headed monstrosity, and interpreting the term in a novel way—a downright abominable way. It is claiming that hungry men, unable to reach mother earth, from whose womb of natural opportunities they are barred by the holders of the social opportunities (capital), are not in the condition prerequisite for entering into a free contract! The many-headed monster is setting up the theory that such hungry men are under duress when they contract with an employer, that the employer takes advantage of their stress, and that the “wages-contract,” thus entered upon, is no contract at all, no more than when the wayfarer surrenders his purse to the highwayman, who covers him with a bludgeon! The many-headed monster is even more impudent. It demands the establishment of conditions for what it impudently calls the “true” freedom of contract—conditions under which natural and social opportunities, land and machinery, being open to all, as the property of all, whoever contracts shall be at a par with whomsoever he contracts with! And in the meanwhile the many-headed monstrosity carries its monstrous impudence to the point of setting up artificial fortifications, which it unpa-

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triotically names “unions” and from behind which it seeks to restrict the freedom all along enjoyed by the employer!

Of course, such impudent assumptions are enough either to disgust or to enrage the liberty-loving employer. His one-time freedom of whacking the lion’s share out of his helpless workingmen is threatened to be put in chains, and even his one-time dearly cherished liberty, of calling the terms that he dictated to his workingmen “a contract,” is being questioned!

At a season, so trying to the capitalist class, what could there be more opportune than the ringing voice of a liberator—the right man, at the right place, uttering the right word—and insisting that the employers’ “struggle for private and public liberty” is the vital question of the day?

Salve, Eliot, Liberator!

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