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EDITORIAL

## ARE THEY DONKEYS, OR FELONS?

By DANIEL DE LEON

**M**R. F.W. Haskell's article in the *Engineering Magazine* for this month on railway accidents has been called "a notable article." In order to appreciate the full extent of its "notability," Mr. Haskell's article should be read by the light of the appalling figures of railroad accidents during the last twelve months, and also by the light of the praises bestowed upon it by the capitalist press, which hails it "notable."

The figures in rough—and they certainly are below rather than above the mark—for the number of injured and slain is 150,000 in one year. Mr. Haskell's theory is that these injuries and deaths are mainly due to the negligence of the employes; according to the gentleman's theory, they are the ones to blame. Mr. Haskell is no autocratic reasoner. On that score credit is due him. He furnishes the facts from which he draws his conclusion—the conclusion that the fault lies with the employes. Here are two of his facts:

A locomotive engineer said to him: "Why, my dear sir, if we followed all the rules we would never get a train in."

A signalman, whom he questioned, answered: "We couldn't get the freight trains over the road if we kept them a block apart."

These two facts are worth millions of minor ones. They certainly explain the huge number of collisions resulting in the appalling number of injuries and deaths by railroad accidents. But do they locate the blame upon the employes? Who does not know that the innumerable "rules" set up by the companies are set up only for the purpose of holding the companies free in cases of accidents? Who does not know that the employes are ordered to bring the trains in, and that, as the two witnesses quoted above testify, it is impossible to obey these orders and yet observe the rules? Who does not know that the employes are placed before the dilemma of either

obeying the order to bring the trains in and keeping their jobs (if they survive), or violating the order by the observance of the rules, and then be discharged? Who does not know that the dividends of the roads depend upon the trains coming in? These are all matters of common knowledge, and many a time the knowledge has been tragically imparted to the public by a severely maimed locomotive engineer, upon whom the company sought to add the insult of blame to the injury caused by their own orders and unexecutable rules. Even the veriest innocent could detect from the testimony of the two witnesses, whom Mr. Haskell places upon the stand, the evidence of their helplessness—the impossibility of obeying both the order to “get the train in” and the rules for safety; even the least sophisticated can perceive that the paramount order is to “get the train in”; who but boobies are ignorant of the fact that the size of dividends and the magnitude of the gains of speculators, depend upon “the train’s getting in”?

It is no secret to the intelligent man that capitalist society runs and is run rough-shod over human life; nor is it a secret that the employe class is the first, the principal sufferer. The article written, in all sobriety, that places the blame upon the employe, and the praises of such an article—all the more when the conclusions arrived at by the article twist awry the very testimony upon which the conclusions are based—brand both author and his praise-singers as either egregious donkeys or double-dyed felons!

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