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EDITORIAL

LEWIS' KNOCK-OUT BLOW.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE March *Cosmopolitan*, a Hearst paper, publishes a "Table Talk", with Socialism as the subject. The participants in the talk are three, and they are introduced to the public as David Graham Phillips and Alfred Henry Lewis, well known individualist writers on reform, and W.J. Ghent, "well known", the readers are told, "as one of the leading scientific Socialists of the day". The article is headed by a picture of the talkers as they sit around a table. Already the look on the faces of Messrs Lewis & Phillips, as the one leans towards the other, indicates that they are prepared to have fun at the expense of Mr. Ghent. The very start of the talk confirms the initial impression; as the talk proceeds the impression grows stronger apace, until the end is reached, when it becomes an obvious fact in the neat knock-out dealt by Mr. Lewis to "one of the leading scientific Socialists of the day".

The sparring was skillfully started by Messrs Lewis and Graham who put to Mr. Ghent the question whether "in his opinion there was any valid reason for the restive state of the masses". With Messrs Graham & Lewis thereupon putting in here and there a word, intended to keep Mr. Ghent from flying off to Japan, London, Germany and Manchuria, and to make him stick to the United States, the gentleman sailed in to state "the reasons for Socialism". Shortly summarized, the reasons were:

"Despite a hundredfold increase in wealth, only the few have an increase of luxury, the masses remain steeped in poverty";

"Ninety per cent. of the workers have no home to call their own beyond the end of the week";

"There are ten million persons in America who are constantly living at or below the bare margin of normal existence";

“Seventy thousand school children in New York City are underfed”;

“Railroads and trolleys alone kill about 12,500 and injure about 150,000 yearly”;

“A terrible mortality prevails from unhealthy occupations at which men, women and children are forced to work”;

“Graft, swindling, oppression and hunger prevail to-day”; etc.

These being the category of evils cited by Mr. Ghent in the name of Socialism, and given by the gentleman as the reason for Socialism, Mr. Lewis stepped forth to end the contest, and ended it like a robust pugilist, tired of fooling. Said he:

“There isn’t, take it any way you will, any evil named by Socialism [by the “one of the leading scientific Socialists of the day”] that an honest, thorough enforcement of existing law wouldn’t cure”.

This answer was a stroke of genius. It was a complete knock-down and knock-out to Ghentian Socialism. The rest of Mr. Lewis’ answer amounted virtually to nothing more than to perambulate over the prostrate form of his prostrate adversary, and then to perambulate over it some more.

Socialism—not the Socialism (?) represented by folks upon which a Hearst paper will bestow the title of being its leading scientific exponents of the day—cites, not a score of evils, but just ONE as the reason for Socialism—WAGE SLAVERY, that social condition of the majority, and inevitably an ever swelling majority, of the people which keeps them down to the level of chattel-merchandise. That evil no law, however honestly, however thoroughly enforced, can affect anymore than a mustard plaster could affect a wooden leg. Where the grafts of the McCalls and Hydes, the recklessness of life on the part of the railroads, the negligence of factory owners, the inhumanity manifested by the deepening poverty of the masses, hand in hand with the swelling luxury of the few; etc.; etc.;—where such phenomena and such alone are pointed at, and are cited as the cause of social discontent and the reason for Socialism, there the point must be conceded that law, joined of course with the requisite moral regeneration to enforce it thoroughly and honestly, would fill the bill. Where, however, all these and many more phenomena are pointed to, not as the cause, but as the inevitable result of the existing social structure; where the finger

is pointed squarely at, and is firmly placed upon, the very cornerstone of the existing social structure, as the real charge, and the cause of the evil, then the charge would either have to be denied, to the ultimate discomfiture of the denier, or it would have to be admitted, and, if admitted, as, of course, were the charges of Ghentian Socialism, no reforms or individualistic tinkering with laws could for an instant suggest itself to the mind, but only REVOLUTION—that revolution implied by the long-headed forecast of Madison who, nearly a hundred years ago, foresaw the day when our American social system would require RECONSTRUCTION.

Alfred Henry Lewis may be charged with cruelty for applying the sledgehammer blow that he did in order to knock down his opponent; it may be charged that so spindle-legged a theory, as that of Ghentian Socialism, called not for so heavy a knock; and we, ourselves, might be charged with equal cruelty for the full-throated “Bravo!” with which we acclaim Mr. Lewis’ feat. But neither he nor we are cruel. Ghentian Socialism is an unqualified nuisance. It is a stumbling block in the way of practical work. Socialism holds the Hearst Reformers to be wrong; they hold Socialism to be equally mistaken. The only effect of Ghentian Socialism is to interfere with the practical demonstration of which is right and which errs. Ghentian Socialism has not the remotest chance of success at the polls; yet, by arrogantly striking an I-know-more-than-you attitude towards the Hearst Reformers, it interferes with the latter’s facility to prove their case or stand disproved; by impudently pretending to be more practical than Socialism it tends to confuse the masses. Accordingly, both Socialism and the Reformers have a common interest—moved, in both, by a lofty purpose, the desire to urge the solution of the Social Question—in seeing Ghentian Socialism knocked down and out of the ring, beyond resurrection, so soon as possible.

Therefore—Well done, Henry Austin Lewis!

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