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EDITORIAL

WORK, NOT SOUP.

By DANIEL DE LEON

IT is with a laugh on the wrong corner of their mouths that the British capitalist papers report the meeting of the Battersea unemployed. Their laugh is of the sort that hides a sigh in the wrinkle of a smile—and well may they sigh. The workers are waking up to “John Burns, M.P., and Cabinet Member.”

At that meeting of the unemployed a letter was drawn up and ordered sent to John Burns. A passage of the letter runs as follows:

“We also think that your past experiences of the work of charity should have made it quite unnecessary for you to make further experiments like those on the Embankment to prove the utter futility of charity. Further, whilst agreeing that epigrams, quotations, and well-rounded sentences are admirable in themselves and diverting to a well-fed audience, they do nothing to fill the empty stomachs of the workers.”

These be impudent words, from an impudent *canaille*, too impudent to enjoy vicariously the good things that are vicariously conveyed to them by the capitalist class, by bestowing them upon Mr. Burns.

These be impudent words for other and still more disagreeable reasons. The disagreeableness of the first consideration proceeds simply from that sense of sorrow that Philanthropy ever experiences at the sight of ingratitude. But “sorrows with bread,” observed the wise Sancho Panza, “are bearable.” Philanthropy may sorrow at ingratitude; but Philanthropy’s paunch being well stuffed with bread, that sorrow is bearable, quite so. Less bearable; much less so; in fact, almost unbearable is the taste left in Philanthropy’s mouth by utterances, backed with postures, that somehow or other assume the character of prophetic “Writings on the wall.”

When a *canaille* begins to reject “soup” and to insist on “work,” it will not be long before the “work” it insists upon will be enlarged to all that it implies—and it

implies worlds. It implies, first, the Right to Work; it implies, secondly, the public ownership of the means of work, without which the Right to Work is a vapor; finally, it implies a certain kind of work, without which public ownership would ever remain a goal unreached—that certain kind of work implied is the work of bouncing, through the united political and economic action of the *canaille*, the barnacles that now indulge in the philanthropic luxury of ladeling out soup.

Obedient to the maxim: “The first shall be the last, and the last shall be the first,” this last named WORK, must and will be the one to start with. It is all implied and embraced in the slogan:

“Work, Not Soup!”

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