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EDITORIAL

RIGHT—WITH AN “IF.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

NO less a clarion of capitalism than the *New York Tribune*, of March 2, pronounces “Successful but Useless” the experiment of a Brooklyn woman who, to prove that clothes and ostentation make “society,” introduced into one of her soirees two working girls, who in their true character would have been snubbed by every one of the company, but who in \$450 pearl gowns had the honor to draw even the homage of a Count. The “uselessness” and worse than “uselessness” of the experiment is predicated by the *Tribune* upon the assumption that after their brief peep into wealth the two girls returned home “with a sense of dissatisfaction with conditions which had previously been accepted as a matter of course.”

The *Tribune* is right—with an “if.”

Given man’s anatomical constitution, he can neither walk on ceilings nor live without eating. Desirable as either might be, to essay it is vain, to regret it, folly. He who would instal himself upon a pedestal of outraged justice, inveigh against these incapacities, and stir people to discontent against them, would be merely a meddlesome scold, and his preachments and proofs common nuisances because useless bayings at the inevitable.

Point-blank the opposite lies the case with poverty. Poverty is neither an inevitable “infliction of Providence,” nor yet a result of man’s constitution. In this day and age it is the result of the concentrated ownership of the social implements of production in a few private hands. The possessing few are thus enabled to exploit the possessionless many out of the four-fifths of what they produce. Not only this; claiming to “captain” industry, the possessing few really aid in production no more and no less than a drag assists a wagon to run up-hill. Half the labor-power of the world they turn into non-productive channels; by the deliberate suppression of patents they keep the other half at toil at defective machinery; and of what is

produced despite these obstacles they regularly plough up, burn, or throw away large quantities to “tone” the market.

This, the *Tribune* may know, is the capitalist system. Overthrow the system, rear in its room the co-operative commonwealth, and poverty is a thing of the past. But for that agitation is necessary, education, organization. Hence whatever rouses discontent with iniquitous but unnecessary “conditions previously accepted as a matter of course” is not useless, but in the highest degree useful. It is a first step in advance. Only “if” poverty were as unescapable as man’s inability to walk upon ceilings, would the *Tribune* be right. As things are, being right only with the “if,” and the “if” leaving it totally in the lurch, the *Tribune* is thereby left totally in the wrong—a typically capitalist posture.

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