

Daniel De Leon

Editorial: Brother Sovereign's Bees

In an editorial article, commented upon in our last week's issue,¹ Brother Sovereign, the new editor of the *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, tells a touching story about some honey bees which he had gathered in the days of his boyhood, which then suddenly began to wane, and which, after considerable anguish, died pitifully; and he tells how, upon opening the hives, he was horrified to find his pets had succumbed to an inroad of millers or moths. "It was all our own fault," exclaims our brother editor. "We had neglected to place a piece of projecting tin around the entrance to the hives to keep the millers out." Proceeding thereupon to give the moral of his story, Brother Sovereign goes on to say:

In this illustration the money power represents the miller and the moths, and leading Socialists refuse to place anything around the entrance to the hive of human industry to keep them out. They are willing to let them come into the hive and eat the honey of industry with the worms of usury, and weave their cobwebs around the workers until all are caught in the meshes and die of starvation.

As a bit of literature the bees' story is idyllic and pretty. Were we engaged in publishing a belles-lettric journal we

¹ "The Old, Old Tune, *The People*, March 10, 1895. See above.—R.B.

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would comment upon it only favorably. We would even be inclined, for the sake of its pastoral beauties, to overlook the grave sociologic error that underlies it. Unfortunately, however, the times are not for macaronics. We are constrained to reverse the process; we are, against our liking, in duty bound to leave aside the poetic merits of the story and address ourselves to its material defect.

The comparison of millers or moths with the “money power” in our social system reveals a total misconception of the mechanism of capitalism—a misconception so fundamental that it is bound to lead to the greatest errors in tactics.

Moths or millers do not grow out of bees; bees and hives do not develop moths or millers. Neither is predicated upon the other. There can be moths or millers without bees; and, inversely, there can be bees and hives without moths.

But how about the “money power?” There can be no “money power” without money. The question then comes, Can there be money or usury without private ownership in land and capital; in other words, can there be money or usury without capitalism? Or, again, Can there be capitalism without money and usury and all that thereby hangs? History, political economy, sound reasoning, all emphatically answer “No!” Money, usury, etc., are developments from the private ownership of the things needed to produce wealth by; money and its adjuncts are the result of individual production which requires individual exchange. Where there is no individual production, there no money or its consequences can grow; where money is, its consequences are unavoidable, and the one and the other are predicated upon private ownership, they denote that private ownership is in existence. The capitalist system of production and distribution, the capitalist social system, under which we live, is the highest development of the system of private ownership in the machinery of production; under such a system money is a natural, a logical, an inevitable development. No capitalism, no money; where capitalism is, money power must be.

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Comparable with money were the sting of the bee. There could be no bee's sting without a bee; where a bee is, the sting will be found, or the bee will wilt. The bee develops the sting; the sting grows out of the bee. No bee, no sting; no sting, no bee. No one would claim similarly{;} No bees, no moths; no moths, no bees.

It is evident from this exposition, which is based upon zoological principles that none can gainsay and upon sociological facts that none can shake, that the relation between money and industry, carried on capitalistically, destroys the comparison of moths or millers with the money power.

If money had an independent existence from the capitalist system, the same as moths and millers have an independent existence from bees, then it were wise and feasible to keep out the nuisance of money, the same as it is wise and feasible to keep millers out of hives. But in view of the fact that money is as completely a development from capitalism as stings are {a} development from bees, it were as choice a piece of folly to try a scheme whereby to keep the money power from the hives of industry as it would be to place a piece of projecting tin around the entrance of a hive to expect thereby to keep the stings of the baby bees from growing. A knowledge of the mechanism of bees will guard a man from such folly. A knowledge of the mechanism of capital guards the Socialists from the similar folly with regard to money.

The money power cannot be "guarded against;" it can only be overthrown; but it cannot be overthrown without capitalism, the root of money, is pulled out.

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*A De Leon editorial transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the
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