

EDITORIAL

THE ART OF ACCIDENTAL MURDER.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE fact of the number of killed and wounded in the subway explosion at Forty-first street and Park avenue is not of so much moment as the attitude taken by the press, the courts, and public officials, on that "accident." It is only a few short days since the "accident" in the Grand Central tunnel. In fact that "accident" is now a bone of contention in the courts. The newer and almost equally disastrous "accident" has therefore rasped on the edge, stung the sore, re-opened the wound made by the former "accident." The nerves of the capitalist class, the nerves which in themselves are directly represented by the press, the courts, and public officials, are quivering with excitement, and jangling with apprehension. It is, therefore, not to be expected that there could be or would be any right action or right thinking from these men. They are too busy with their own dire forebodings to direct the public mind.

So unwonted is their excitement that they rise up and shriek aloud for vengeance against someone, something, anyone, anything. They have been taxed beyond endurance, and they want something done, it matters not whether that something is good or bad, right or wrong. This is without exception the moral and mental state of the capitalist press, and that state has its accompaniment in all other representative public capitalist bodies.

The two recent "accidents" bring to light the undisputed facts that laws have been violated. It is a violation of law to risk deliberately the life of another individual. That is what was done in the tunnel and in the subway. In the latter instance, also, there was a violation of the law governing the storing of explosives. Both violations of the law resulted in death, destruction of property, and in the injury of many persons, to an extent that cannot be computed.

The Socialist Labor Party, and its organ, THE PEOPLE, stand opposed to murder in every form, and these "accidents" are murder, and deliberate murder at that. There would be no "accident" were proper precautions taken. These

precautions would be taken did they not cost money. Consequently the direct and sole cause for these “accidents” is a desire for profits. The owners of the road, and the persons conducting operations will run any risk rather than reduce their own profit.

Now the press, the courts, and public officials are the special defenders, the guardians, and the apologists of capitalism and the acts of the capitalist class. In the present instance they know that much is required of them, but the task is of such a nature that they lose their center and act like mad-men. We have the spectacle of the press howling and raving, and we have the spectacle of a District Attorney acting like an enraged or demented ruffian.

The magnitude of these disasters is what serves to call attention to them, but they are caused by conditions no more lax and no more illegal than the conditions that exist where the “accidents” are of a minor nature, or where the risk has no fatal results. For example, the building laws are violated every day in the matter of guard rails on stagings: the laws relative to elevators are violated: the tenement house laws are violated: the pure food laws are violated: the sanitation laws are violated: the factory laws are violated: mine laws are violated: navigation laws are violated, etc., etc. All these violations result in an occasional “accidental” death, or else in systematic poisoning, leading either to a condition of chronic ill health or to ultimate death. The papers which now rave and threaten have but a passing word for the violations which claim their hundreds, where tunnel and subway accidents claim but a single life.

The facts in the case return inevitably to one point: the capitalist class is a criminal class, and it is criminal because it must squeeze profits from the workers in order to live. The incentive of the capitalist class, the incentive that drives it to risk everything but its own miserable hide, is profit, and profit, to be increased, means the intensified exploitation of the working class.

The “accidents” that have lately occurred are but larger instances of every day history. They are but major points in what goes on systematically. They are inevitable outcroppings of capitalism. They can be treated, they can be considered only by treating and considering capitalism. They can be ended only by ending capitalism.

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

Uploaded August 2006