

EDITORIAL

RIGHT IS “THE SUN.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE Washington Place holocaust¹—already referred to in these columns as an event illuminative of the decision rendered shortly before by the Court of Appeals, pronouncing unconstitutional the Workmen’s Compulsory Compensation law—may be turned to further useful purpose as a flambeau by the glare of which to read the commentary on the Court of Appeal’s decision made by the *New York Sun* on March 25—the morning of the very evening of the holocaust.

Quoting from the Court’s decision—“Under our form of government Courts must regard all economic, philosophical and moral theories, however attractive and desirable they may be, as subordinate to the primary question whether they can be moulded into statutes without infringing upon the letter or spirit of our written Constitution”—and planting itself hereon, the *Sun* sums up the lengthy decision in few words: “It brings again into sharp focus the main fact of our civilization and our system of government,” to wit, as the rest of the *Sun*’s commentary may, in turn be summed up,—“The main fact of our civilization and system of government is that property is more valuable than life.”

Referring, on the very evening of the morning in which the *Sun*’s commentary appeared, to the factory building that burned down, and thereby did to death scores of workers; Chief Croker of the Fire Department said: “These buildings are called fireproof. They aren’t fireproof, they merely burn slow. They are so built that combustion is slow and the firemen have a chance to save property; but how about the lives? They aren’t death-proof.”

The *Sun* is right. Chief Croker puts in the underscoring.

The main fact of present civilization is PROPERTY. Merely to denounce the fact would be to slip into Anarchistic wild-eyed ranting. The pre-eminence given by

¹ [The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of March 25, 1911.—R.B.]

Capitalist Society to property is not a manifestation of deliberate inhumanity. It is a psychologic manifestation for which Capitalist Society must be held excusable; to be pitied, rather than blamed; and by reason of which modern economic capabilities justly demand its abolition—soon as possible; none too soon.

Life is dependent upon property. The measure of life's fruition is determined by the certainty of the property necessary for its support. Uncertainty of property is the scourge of the savage. The gradations from savage to civilized existence are marked by the increased and increasing certainty of property. With the increased fruition of life that flows from increased certainty of comes the need and demand for ampler property. The two tendencies—the aspiration for certainty and the aspiration for ampleness of property—act and react upon, and intensify each other. It is something more than instinct, it is experience that pushes and leads the race along this line. It is a virtue.

But even virtue needs guidance, and the check of the mind. Well does philosophy point out that Virtue unguarded is the certain source of Vice—Vice being but Virtue carried to excess. Pathetically does the philosophic pen of George Eliot sketch an illustration of the fact in the figure of Silas Marner. The illustration is pat to the subject in hand. Moved by the virtuous impulse of healing the wound in his heart and supporting himself, Silas became industrious in the village of his refuge. He succeeded. The sad past receded into oblivion, and his material needs were amply supplied. By degrees, however, the means, industry, transformed itself into an end. Silas became a hoarder, a miser, a drudge of work. The original Virtue, carried to excess, became a Vice. The psychology of Silas Marner's evolution is society's. Propelled by the Virtue of endeavoring to escape from the savage condition of insecurity of property, further impelled by the added Virtue of endeavoring to attain the civilized state of ampleness, besides certainty of property, society reached the present Capitalist stage where the means to the end has been gradually transformed until to-day it has become the end itself. The original Virtue of striving after Property as the prop of Life has grown into the Vice of lowering Life to the prop of Property. The end has become the means, the means the end. The monstrous point is reached when Property rules Man, not Man Property. The psychologic development is so complete that a mouthpiece of Capitalist Society, of

no less eminence than the New York *Sun*, epitomizes as proper, and as a matter of course, the judicial interpretation of the Constitution which places Property above Life as "the main fact of our civilization and our system of government."

It took an event not much short of revolution in his life to re-humanize Silas Marner, to re-enthroned his Virtue, and chase the Vice back to its kennel. What a private revolution did in Silas's home, the pending Social Revolution will accomplish for Society restoring LIFE to supremacy, PROPERTY to vassalage.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded January 2012

slpns@slp.org