



EDITORIAL

IF THIS IS NOT PEFFER, WHO COULD IT BE?

By DANIEL DE LEON

ONE of the Washington correspondents writes to New York that “a Senator” said to him: “Cleveland will fail in his attempts against the Sherman act; he will be out-generated by the silver men; let the banks look out for their hides, Congress may be driven into making laws that will impose penalties for the past!”

What Senator have we in Washington sufficiently addle-brained, confused and vicious, outside of Peffer, who could have got off this tirade?

If, as it looks, Cleveland wants the Sherman act repealed, the thing will be done. The Administration is wholly in the hands of the big capitalist class. To begin with the head of the nation, Cleveland’s pockets are bulging with stocks of trust concerns; around him, as his “constitutional advisers”, are leading organizers of trusts and monopolies, presidents of railway companies, attorneys for corporations, etc.; above them all rise the gigantic capitalist figures of William C. Whitney and Henry Villard, the one the representative of domestic, the other of foreign bond and stock-holders. The big labor-skinning capitalist has become reckless in his acts; he is confident of his powers; the small labor-skinning capitalist, or middle class is at the end of its tether, and the big capitalist does not propose to let up; the two are engaged in a struggle which can end only in the triumph of the big fellow—small production is doomed, and with it all the interests of the small producer. An increase of money, especially of cheap money, would now suit the middle class debtors; although it could only serve to lengthen its agony, it



WILLIAM ALFRED PEFFER
(1831–1912)

wants such increase; but for the same reason that the middle class wants it, the upper or big capitalist does not want it. It was evident to any but the most superficial observer, since last January two years ago, that the plutocracy would not yield an inch, would not grant free coinage or any sub-treasury plan worth having; since then this fact has become more and more self-evident, and to-day, ten to one, the full blown capitalist interests will move onward and wipe out the Sherman act itself, thereby shutting the doors in the face of the silverites.—It takes a man like Peffer, whose brains are in his whiskers, and who has undertaken the Quixotic job of saving the middle class as such and to imagine his class can make front against the big capitalist; it takes such a visionary to fail to perceive that there is no hope whatever for the small property and no-property-holders except in the total abolition of private property in the machinery of production and the conversion of all into share holders of one big productive concern, i.e., the Co-operative Commonwealth.

Then again, it is contrary to the essence of justice to pass *ex post facto* laws, i.e., laws that render criminal and punishable as such offences not so declared to be at the time of their enactment. Whatever rascality the banking class has committed—and the number of such rascalities is legion—they were not only the results of the capitalist system of private property in the machinery of production, but they have their exact counterparts in the acts of the small property-holder or the middle class; the two, as genuine competitors for the lion's share of the fleecings of labor, did their best to trick one another; it was trick against trick; plot and counter-plot. In this glorious tussle the middle class got the worst of it. To now pass laws that shall render punishable as crimes, deeds that both were essentially guilty of, were the very essence of injustice.—To propose doing such a thing one must have the characteristics of a Peffer, a fellow who demands with false piety an investigation of the Homestead murders by the Pinkertons and then signs a report of the investigating committee that contains not one charge against the pirates and their hirers, and that insultingly warns the workingmen that they must “obey the law.” The plan to pass *ex post facto* laws against the bankers, and thereby break the Constitution itself of the United States, is a fit companion piece for a white-washing report, that condones the breach of law committed by the capitalists of Homestead, and warns the toilers to “submit to the law”.

Ten to one the Senator in question is “labor's champion”, Peffer.

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