

# DAILY PEOPLE

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EDITORIAL

## STRAY LIGHTS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**A** LITTLE item in last week's dailies gave the now no longer uncommon news of the decapitation of a child by a street car in this city; but it closed with the following somewhat unusual statement of facts and expression of surprise:

“One dudish-looking man handed his card to the conductor as a witness. Another witness for the company said that he had been a railroader himself and had once put in seven days in jail for running over a ‘coon’. It is a noticeable fact these days, the number of people who wish to offer their services as witnesses for the companies when an accident occurs.”

Quite a stray bit of light on present conditions! Quite a commentary on the rampant prosperity that the whole country is said to be weltering in!

That there is prosperity somewhere, who denies it? The point is that this prosperity is limited to a comparatively small portion of the population, located away above the masses; while below these few, there is such heart freezing, pinching poverty that it takes the statistician of “averages” to impute any share of the prosperity to the masses.

In the common hell of poverty are, accordingly, found to-day both “dudish-looking men” and rough-looking workingmen. The decreasing opportunities for work and the earning of a living must have been long pinching the entrails of the masses and petrifying them for things to have come to the pass that “dudish-looking men” and rough-looking workingmen are on the alert to draw profit from misfortune; on the alert for railway accidents so as to get the job of “witness” for railway companies when accidents occur. Not cruelty, not sympathy with the powerful wrongdoers, but intensified goodness of heart and spirit of hostility for the powerful wrongdoers is the first stage of feelings that the soul travels through on the downward incline of economic want. The stage of cruelty and of readiness to be of service to the powerful

wrong-doer is a later stage. Between the first stage and this there is a long stretch. Evidently the stretch has been cleared, at least by a vanguard.

Capitalism, having outlived its usefulness, has turned into a devastating prairie fire, the flames of which are driving man into unspeakable abysses. One set flees into the army, and dons the livery of legalized murder and rapine; another set drowns its sufferings in the oblivion of suicide, or its twin-sister, drunkenness; a third flings itself, its honor, its chastity, all that is dearest in the present and in hope, on the streets, and desecrates the solemn stillness of the night with a strumpet's brazen laughter; a fourth, with less fibre to hold out, lands in lunatic asylums. Long were the list of heads under which the victims of the present "social order" assort themselves. A new head has now come to notice: the head of encouraging the railway companies to run an insufficient number of cars so as to save "hands;" thereby compelling reckless driving, lest the "hands" employed lose their places for not being on time; and thus inviting accidents that will render "witnesses" useful to the companies so as to throw the blame of their criminal misconduct upon the victims, and escape paying them or their survivors the damages "provided by law."

Well may he, at times, be appalled upon whose senses the cross lights fall, that the phosphorescence of decomposing capitalist society throws off along its path. But in the Socialist no such feeling is lasting. It only serves to stiffen his hold on the Hammer of the Fighting S.L.P., with which to smash capitalism and rear the Socialist Republic.

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

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