

EDITORIAL

## THE WONDERFUL CAPITALIST TAR-BABY.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**W**HO that has read Joel Chandler Harris's "The Wonderful Tar-Baby Story" as told by his masterly creation, Uncle Remus, has not been convulsed with laughter at the clever manner in which Brer Fox entrapped and humiliated Proud Brer Rabbit?

He, who has read the story, will recall with considerable amusement how, in the language of Uncle Remus, "Brer Fox went to work en got 'im some tar en mix it up wid some turkentine, en fix up a contrapshun w'at he call a 'Tar-Baby,' and sot'er in de big road" while he (Brer Fox) "lay low" until Brer Rabbit came along "dez as sassy as a jay bird." He will recall how Brer Rabbit made sundry inquiries of the Tar-Baby apropos of her health, only to recieve no answer, which duly irritated him, "while Brer Fox he lay low." Brer Rabbit grew more vociferous, insistent and threatening, but "Tar-Baby stay still, en Brer Fox lay low." Finally, exasperated beyond control, "Brer Rabbit drew back his fis,' he did, and blip he tuck 'er side of de head. Right dar's where he broke his merlasses jug. His fis' stuck, en he can't pull loose. De tar hilt 'im. But Tar-Baby, she stay still, en Brer Fox, he lay low." The reader of the story will further recall how Brer Rabbit demanded to be turned loose and upon being refused "he fotch 'er a wipe wid de udder han', en dat stuck" while the "Tar-Baby she ain't sayin' nuthin', en Brer Fox, he lay low"; how, growing still more insistent upon his release, he used both his feet and they got stuck, while the "Tar-Baby she ain't sayin' nuthin', en Brer Fox he lay low"; how finally "Brer Rabbit squall out dat ef de Tar-Baby don't tu'n him loose he but 'er cranksided. En den he butted, en his head got stuck. Den Brer Fox, he sa'ntered fort', lookin' des ez innercent ez wunner yo' mammay's mockin' birds," and taunted the now helpless and crestfallen Brer Rabbit. Who, we repeat, that has read this inimitable Tar-Baby story, has not been convulsed with laughter at Brer Fox's clever ruse? And who will

not recall it with amusement and delight?

Brer Fox's Tar-Baby, as wonderful as it is, is not, however, the only "contrapshun," made up of deception, that has been projected to catch the unwary. "There are others," perhaps even more wonderful. There is one of these "contrapshuns" that plays a conspicuous part in the lives of Brer Capital and Brer Labor, and which is used by the former to the greater glory and gain of the latter.

This Tar-Baby is known as the British or pure and simple trade union adjunct of capitalism. Its whole result has been to bring the working class, physically and intellectually,—hands, feet, and head—to the sticky Tar-Baby{,} the capitalist system{,} that is run for the profit of Brer Capital.

Brer Capital has rigged it out and set it out on the "big road" that leads to labor's emancipation—"the co-operative commonwealth." Along comes Brer Labor instinctively conscious of his strength, defiant, determined, "dez as sassy as a jay-bird," if you will, and he espies this "contrapshun," the pure and simple Tar-Baby. Thinking that through it, he can secure an answer to his demand for a shorter worker-day, he uses one hand—the eight hour movement. Brer Labor draws back his fist and strikes, with the result that his toil is intensified and his trade-life shortened, while the unemployed, for whom the demand was originally made, tend to increase and involve him in strike failures. In the meanwhile, the Tar-Baby, true to its past, says nothing while Brer Capital lays low.

Angered by the trap into which he has fallen, Brer Labor demands to be turned loose—he wants favorable factory legislation. Brer Labor uses his other hand—his legislative influence—only to have "the labor laws" enacted for his alleged benefit declared unconstitutional and unenforcible. In the meanwhile Brer Labor's legislative influence has been used to promote capitalist legislation from which he derives no benefit—the Ship Subsidy Bill and the Chinese Firemen Amendment, for instance. All the while the Tar-Baby says nothing and Brer Capital he lays low.

Now, thoroughly indignant, Brer Labor uses a foot —Independent Political Action—with the result that a lot of bogus "labor" Mayors, who in no wise differ from their capitalist contemporaries, as far as labor is concerned, are elected and duly absorbed by the two old capitalist parties. Brer Labor next fumes and storms and threatens direful things; he strikes, is clubbed, enjoined, is damaged and does damage. He uses his other leg—called Arbitration—and that sticks, as in San

Francisco and Boston, where Brer Labor is duped and cheated, while Brer Capital triumphs. All the while the Tar-Baby says nuthin' and Brer Capital he lay low.

Next Brer Labor threatens to use his head. He will end the capitalist system by studying Socialism and substituting industrial plutocracy with industrial democracy. He uses his head, only to have it caught and held fast in the Tar-Baby sophistry that Capital and Labor have mutual interests and that the progress of one depends on the other. In the meanwhile the Tar-Baby says nothing, while Brer Capital he saunters forth and to prove the truth of the Tar-Baby sophistry flaunts his riches in the face of Brer Labor's poverty.

But Brer Labor will not always be ensnared by Brer Capital, while "he lay low" and the "Tar-Baby says nothing." His kindred—the class-conscious workingmen—are learning to know the Tar-Baby that says nothing and the Brer Capitals that "lay low."

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

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