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EDITORIAL

## THEIR HEADLONG COURSE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**I**F straws tell the direction of a stream, beams make the announcement with still stronger emphasis. Such a beam upon the stream of capitalist usurpation is the announcement from Cincinnati, published in these columns, to the effect that the Meek Company of Coshocton, O., instituted a suit to restrain a former employee from engaging his services to another firm. The plea of the Meek Company is that the said former employee, John P. Stetson, developed and acquired marked ability as a salesman in the Company's employ, and that, consequently, he has no right to use the experience thus obtained in the interest of another firm.

"Freedom of employment" has been one of the favorite capitalist beatitudes. Whenever a capitalist chose to dismiss or employ at his whim, he and his likes always filled their mouths with the motto: "Freedom! You can go or come as you please; and we have the right to engage you or not, as we choose." Another and supplemental beatitude of Capitalism has been the claim: "The workingman can always improve his condition, provided he has sufficient initiative." What becomes of these maxims? The Meek Company shows that, with it, for one, the maxims were but false pretence.

If a workingman can be restrained from selling his skill to any employer but one, that employer can treat him as the employer chooses; the workingman would become out and out the bondman of that one employer. As to the incentive to learn, what workingman is going to exert himself if he knows that proficiency will spell an iron collar around his neck?

The Dempsey case, some years ago, revealed the theory that it was "intolerable tyranny" to allow an employee to keep certain chemical secrets to himself: the employer was entitled to their possession because otherwise the "employee might tyrannize" the employer. The Meek Company go further. Dempsey was allowed to

go wherever he pleased with whatever part of the secret he knew, all that his employer retained was an equal possession of his secret. The Meek Company are not satisfied with that: they want to retain the employee also—with the alternative of starvation.

Give Capitalism rope and it will itself dispel one by one the illusions that it raises to cheat the workingmen. The workingman's condition is that of slavery. The fact is concealed under the gauze of his "freedom" to exchange masters. We are reaching the point when the capitalist himself will dispel the old illusion of freedom, and bring home to the wage slave that he is literally the slave of his employer, without even the balm of the "freedom" to change.

Capitalism is rushing headlong toward its own destruction. Its blindness is a factor in civilization. It furnishes the proofs which Socialism needs for its case that Capitalism means war upon property, war upon freedom, war upon mankind.

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