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EDITORIAL

BEHIND THE TIMES.

By DANIEL DE LEON

IN the Connecticut Legislature a bill is now pending to introduce the whipping-post. It has been observed that the barometer of a country's civilization is its criminal code. The more barbarous a country, the more barbarous its punishments. Corporal punishment is of the nature of barbarism. Originally it took in the rack, the thumb-screw, etc. By degrees corporal punishment has been abolished. The only leading remnant of it is the death penalty, which, however, is sought to be freed from pain as much as possible. The whipping-post is also a vestige of the days of barbarism. In our country only Delaware has been identified with the whipping-post. Now comes Connecticut. The bare fact would seem enough of a comment on the law of motion, obedient to which the ruling class of the Nutmeg State is sliding down. But there is much more in the appearance of this bill in Connecticut than a mere record of sliding back from civilization to barbarism. The bill patentizes the fact that the Connecticut capitalist class is behind the times as a capitalist class in the advantages to be derived from the workingmen whom it throws into trampdom by its private ownership of labor-displacing machinery.

The bill is really directed against "vagrants," against the tramp. Naughty boys, rude husbands, obstreperous men,—all of these are also listed for the whipping-post; but they are all blinds; the fellow that the capitalists, who back the bill, are after, is the workingman, who tramps the State for a job, instead of submitting without further ado to the starvation wages that he may get in the place that he has left. In other words, the purpose of the bill is to check even that semblance of "freedom" that the workingman is said to enjoy in being "free" to drop the job that does not suit him. The workingman caught tramping is to be whipped. The whipping-post, accordingly, is intended to whip the workingman back into the shop that he was impudent enough, un-American enough, inflammatory enough, riotous enough, disorderly enough to turn his back on:—a shocking confession of being behind the times by the Connecticut capitalists.

It is to be behind the times not to know that the tramping army of the unemployed is recruited mainly, not out of men with a job, and who left it in search of a better, but out of men who are thrown out of their jobs by the privately owned labor-saving machines of the capitalist class. Consequently, it is to be shockingly behind the times to imagine that any amount of whipping can re-instate the displaced workingmen. As far as this feature of the proposed bill is concerned and its purposes, it is comically Malapropish.

But the bill has still another and more marked feature that betrays the backwardness of the Connecticut capitalist mind. In other States, where the capitalist mind is abreast of the mischief it breeds, the source of the tramp is understood. As the tramp springs from the capitalist displacement of labor, no attempt at the impossible is made to re-instate him; instead of that, well planned and ruthlessly executed schemes are resorted to in order to exploit him. Thus it is that in Pennsylvania, New York, and many another industrial State, the tramp is as greedily looked for as partridges by hunters, and is hunted accordingly. The tramp is caught, frequently ensnared, and is sentenced to work for the petty Magistrates who have little cockroach factories, and whose salaries are small.

The tramp receives no pay; he must “work out” his sentence; in jail he gets but the poorest board at the expense of the county. In this way the upper capitalist class—the labor-displacing and tramp-producing capitalist class—exploits the tramp: the salaries of these Magistrates need not be “living salaries,” they may be very small, even nominal, sometimes they are paid none at all. Like waiters, who, in some hotels are expected to make their wages out of “tips,” these Magistrates are expected to make their “salaries” out of the wages which they are saved the necessity of paying to their hands,—and thus the upper capitalist saves taxes.

The Connecticut capitalists are decidedly behind the times.

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

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