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EDITORIAL

BEN TILLET AS A PHOTOGRAPHER.

By DANIEL DE LEON

MR. Ben Tillet, one of the fraternal delegates of the British Trades Union Congress to the Convention of the A.F. of L., almost immediately upon his arrival, made a speech last Sunday before the Central Federated Union, in the course of which he said:

“I am glad to see that in this country there is not so much of a class feeling as in England. When we were coming over with a shipload of Americans, who knew we were workingmen, we were treated with the utmost courtesy.”

Mr. Tillet may stay many months in this country, and he may make innumerable speeches, but never will he be able to reproduce more completely the backward state of mind of the Old, or “Pure and Simple,” or British style of Trades Unionist on the Labor Question than he did in that his first speech delivered on this tour. The class struggle, according to that little speech, does not exist; whatever manifestation there is of it can be removed by politeness; courtesy, applied by capitalists to a workingman is the gauge of the degree in which the class-line shows itself; there was greater courtesy observed towards Mr. Tillet by the American capitalists on board, therefore there is less of a class-line in America than in England. And that statement was at the very time when the window-panes of the hall where Mr. Tillet was speaking, were rattling at the sound of the musketry fire of the Kentucky militia, that was peppering the striking miners of Hopkins county; and that statement was made in the country in which, to every such act of class-rule enacted on the smaller English territory, there are scores and scores of them enacted on the proportionally larger territory of the United States!

The long and short of the picture drawn by Mr. Tillet, of the rank and file understanding of the class-struggle, is that there is no such understanding. How wholly absent that understanding must be may be judged by Mr. Tillet's own understanding of the subject, as given by himself in his little speech. He who is

taken to be one of the most intelligent of the British representatives of Labor, can be thrown off his base on that subject by the external shows of courtesy.

Already, in the days of de Tocqueville, that keen-eyed Frenchman detected that characteristic of the American capitalist toward his wage slaves,—Courtesy, and he pointed it out in graphic language. Under the velvet of courtesy, under the external shows of democratic equality, de Tocqueville showed that the American capitalist concealed a deep animosity for the workingman, and a steeled hand to deal with him. The history of the Labor Movement in America has proved the acuteness of de Tocqueville's estimate on hundreds of blood-stained fields, where the workers were shot down, in hundreds of factories and mines, where their health and lives are toyed with, and in hundreds upon hundreds of court decisions that thrust deep into the flanks of Labor the cold steel of Capitalist Law.

Such sense of the class-struggle, of class-lines, or of class-fleecings that "courtesy" is enough to throw it off its guard stands upon very slippery ground. The English Socialist has yet to lay the very foundation of an intelligent Labor Movement in his country.

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