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EDITORIAL

## THE BED OF PROCRUSTES.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**B**UTTE, Mont., is just now furnishing a sight that is supplemental to that other sight furnished to the country when the Cleveland tariff reduction law was enacted.

Before the enactment of the Cleveland “free trade” bill, the workingmen had been told by their loving friends, the free traders, that a lower tariff would reduce prices, and that the prices of the necessaries of life being reduced Labor would be the difference in pocket. No sooner, however, did the law begin to operate than a new song was sung. “We have all come down in our prices,” said the capitalists: “Labor must also pay its quota”—and down came wages. That happened then.

In Butte the letter carriers have unanimously “tendered their resignations.” (They may not strike: they are Government employes; to strike against the Government is to wage war against it—treason.) The letter carriers resigned. They resigned for the complex reason that Butte is an exceptionally high-priced city, and that the Federal law on the uniformity of salaries keeps the salary of the Butte letter carriers at a grade, which, although it may enable letter carriers to live in other cities, would leave them to die in Butte. Owing to the increased cost of living, Congress generously raised the salaries of its own members. Letter carriers, unable to combat starvation by legislating, to themselves, higher pay, have nothing left but to “resign.”

Among the wicked men, who, according to the Greek legend, Theseus rid the world of, was a certain mechanical genius named Procrustes. This ingenious individual had contrived a bed of peculiar mechanism, on which he strapped the wayfarers that he laid hands on. If the wayfarer was longer than the bed, the excess of length was sawed off at either end; if, on the contrary, the wayfarer was shorter than the bed, his limbs were stretched to match. Procrustes was killed, but though

not hanged to a sour apple tree his soul evidently goes marching on. It has reappeared re-incarnated in the capitalist class.

The bed on which capitalism stretches the wage slave is a regular Procrustean affair. If wages exceed the prices, as happened during free trade periods, the excess is sawed off—Labor is made “to pay its quota.” If however, as is happening in Butte with the letter carriers, wages are shorter than prices, then the wages are expected to be stretched, even to the point of dislocation, to match the bed of prices.

The jungle of capitalism is full of the bandits, that, of old, it took heroes to smite. The names have changed, the things have remained. The job has to be done all over again. It is the working class Theseus whom the doing of the job, once for all, is patiently waiting for.

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