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EDITORIAL

“ANCIENT RÉGIMES.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

IN his history of the “Ancient Régime” Taine tells the story of Louis XV once crossing a path and seeing a peasant carrying a coffin with a corpse in it on his back. “What did the man die of?” asked Louis. “Of hunger!” was the answer. Taine adds: “In that coffin was the Ancient Régime.” The social status is not given of the gentleman who, walking down Ocean Parkway last Sunday, came upon the apparently lifeless body of a workingman, John Altmeyer by name, who, returning on foot from Coney Island, whither he had gone in search of work, found none, was returning on foot to Brooklyn, fell because he had nothing to eat for days, and expired the next day. The social status of the gentleman who came across the “find” is not given. Ten to one, like Louis XV, he was saturated with the notion that, as things are, they will ever be—death from hunger for the many, gout from over-feeding for the few. Louis the XV came in that park across the coffin of the old “Ancient Régime”—the unknown gentleman of Ocean Parkway who came across the expiring corpse of a workingman—one of many in the death throes of Hunger—came across the coffin of the modern “Ancient Régime.”

“A society,” observed Louis Blanc, “in which a single member is in undeserved misery is structurally wrong.” A society in which the class that carries the Nation on its back finds itself where modern society has brought the Working Class to—that society is already in its coffin.

It was not enough for the old “Ancient Régime” to land in its coffin. It had to be buried, lest the decomposing body polluted the air and killed the people. In the days of the old “Ancient Régime” the people bumped their noses against the corpse without yet knowing what it was they bumped against. The consequence was that the pollution went far before the burial took place—with the then inevitable horrors. We live in better times, more enlightened ones. The corpse of the modern

“Ancient Régime” is understood. That it must be buried is also generally admitted. What remains to be done is to organize the funeral procession and ceremonies.

The old “Ancient Régime” of feudalism was not so accommodating a corpse as its successor, the modern “Ancient Régime” of capitalism. Feudalism did not itself train, drill, and form into squadrons the class that was to lower it under ground. More accommodating than its feudal predecessor, is the modern “Old Régime” of capitalism. Necessity compelled it to forge the civilized method of civil agitational warfare—the ballot; the very law of its existence drove it to train and drill and form into squadrons the forces needed to enforce the fiat of its ballot proclamation. All that is needed now is to crystallize the two forces into shape, and the funeral will take place.

With the Socialist Labor Party ballot proclaiming the burial, and the Industrially organized proletariat ready to do the burying, the New Régime of the Socialist Republic will be inaugurated under the most rollicking of “wakes.”

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