

Daniel De Leon

Editorial: Stone-Blind Douglass

A recent issue of the *A.M.E. Church Review* serves as the pedestal for one of the most tragic statues of modern times. FRED DOUGLASS utters one long wail in behalf of his race; he reviews and analyzes the false charges brought against the Negro; the character of the accusers; the motives for their wrong doing; and he closes with an excellent review of the economic enslavement of the colored race in America from which he concludes that the statement that the Negro was, on economic grounds, better off under slavery than now is measurably true. He says:

The Negro cannot save money, because he gets no money to save. He cannot seek a better market for his labor, because he has no money with which to pay his fare, and because he is, by that vicious order-system, already in debt, and therefore already in bondage. Thus, he is riveted to one place and is, in some sense, a slave; for a man to whom it can be said, "You shall work for me for what I choose to pay you and how I shall choose to pay you," is in fact a slave, though he may be called a free man.

To recognize an evil may be cause for gladness, provided the diagnosis is correct and thereby the cure is pointed out. But to recognize an evil and to be clear upon the diagnosis, and yet to fail to see the direction one should pursue to escape its consequences is intensely pitiful. That is the sight FRED DOUGLASS presents.

Daniel De Leon

After such masterful premises, DOUGLASS fails to realize that the plight of the Negro is the plight of Labor in general; that the Northern wage worker freed his fellows from Southern chattel bondage only to place them with himself in wage slavery; that the present cause of the one is the cause of both; and that their salvation depends upon the abolition of the present slavocracy—the capitalist class or plutocracy of the land.

Blind upon this subject, the once inspired apostle of the Negro race now looks hopelessly and wistfully into the future. He had expected freedom for his kind with the abolition of slavery; so believing, he was ardent, vigorous and aggressive; but the fire of former days has died out, the hope that held up languishes, and the arm that once struck mighty blows now hangs limp and impotent—because it knows not how {to} act.

FRED DOUGLASS can to-day be looked upon as a striking monument of the impotence of the warm heart unguided by intelligence. If he possessed the knowledge requisite to guide his feelings, his time would not now be spent in idle wails about “Injustice,” it would be taken up with robust work to overthrow the tyranny that oppresses the whole working class. He would be to-day in the ranks of the Socialists, instead of in those of the very ones whose system keeps the Negro in degradation.

There can be no more pitiful sight than to behold the noble-minded FRED DOUGLASS co-operating, through ignorance, with the ignoble crew of intentional corruptionists among the workingmen, who, under the plea of looking for “Justice,” seek to bunco steer the workers into the shambles of the plutocratic parties.

The People, Vol. IV, No. 21. Sunday, August 19, 1894

Stone-Blind Douglass

*A De Leon editorial transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the
Official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.*

Uploaded November 2002