

EDITORIAL

A “BUSINESS PROPOSITION.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

WHEN two opposing armies meet there is no talk of the approaching conflict being “merely a business proposition.” It is a battle, fraught with disaster and death for one side, and victory for the other. Were the men on either side to talk of “business propositions” at such a time, there could be but one result. “Business propositions,” if carried on in the field, and discovered, mean death. They go by the very ugly, but extremely expressive name of treason. Were it obligatory for the armies to fight, were their existence conditioned on a continuance of the struggle until one side or the other was exterminated, the “business proposition” aspect would be all the uglier, and all the more deserving of summary punishment.

Yet that “business proposition” is the keynote of every act of the “labor leader.” It dominates him, it moves him. It is his pillar of cloud by day and his pillar of fire by night. Yes, and it is the means whereby he moves. With it he traffics backward and forward. For, in a “business proposition,” before you receive you must give.

Simon Burns, general master workman of the Knights of Labor, and also president of the National Organization of Window Glass Workers, illustrates what the “labor leader” gives.

Burns has been conspicuous during the past few years because of the long drawn fight his organization conducted against the manufacturers, and because of the fact that his organization has gone into the glass business, and, theoretically, has plants of its own. But this has not prevented a quarrel that threatens to disrupt the whole organization. Burns still holds his position as head of a “Union,” and he is also a beneficiary of the co-operative scheme. His first position draws him into contact with the manufacturers. He is “fighting” them, and in order to fight them, he seeks to tie up their plants. As a first step, he orders the independent, co-operative plants to be shut down! Those plants are OWNED AND OPERATED BY HIS OWN MEN, and he believed that it would be easy work to have the fires drawn.

The men have rebelled against the order. They could continue work and market their wares without trouble, and they claim that Burns is acting against them. He, on his part, has issued a peremptory command to shut down, and the fight is on.

Why should Burns, always alive to his own interests, thus seemingly act against those interests? Why should he hit his own men in this "business proposition," which is the indication of the unceasing warfare between the working class and the capitalist class?

Burns has become a rich man.

That is not an uncommon thing to-day. There is a surplus of labor power that might be utilized, and from it a fortune might be made. Burns, however, was not engaged in manufacturing. He grew rich in another way. The *Idaho State Tribune*, published at Wallace, Idaho, and edited by the drawn and quartered labor fakir James R. Sovereign, has this item:

"Simon Burns, general master workman of the Knights of Labor, has won the grand prize of sixty thousand dollars in the Mexican lottery. The writer served five years in the official position held by Burns, but was never so fortunate. In fact he never took chances on so doubtful a proposition."

That was because he never thought of it. Burns has become rich, and some excuse must be given for his richness. The Mexican lottery is just as good an excuse as the "house lots in Japan" were to the policemen who were questioned as to the source of their immense wealth. Simon Burns made his money because he recognized that the "difference between capital and labor is a business proposition." Acting on that, he has shut down his own men. Acting on that he has been guilty of furnishing scabs when men were out on strike. Acting on that also, he finds it necessary to discover that he made \$60,000 in a lottery, when everybody knows his money came because striking and labor faking are branches of a "business proposition," and he is in that business.

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

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