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EDITORIAL

THEY LEARNED NOTHING.

By DANIEL DE LEON

BARELY sixty years have passed since the days when it was at the risk of his liberty, if not of his life, that a man openly advocated abolitionism in Virginia. Northern propagandists were arrested, ridden on rails, tarred and feathered, or driven out of town. Did not the Constitution guarantee free speech? The answer was: “That’s all very fine, but—” and the tar and feathering, the imprisoning, or the running out of town was carried out. Sixty odd years have passed away. Abolitionism triumphed. A new cause, greater even than the abolition of chattel slavery, has sprung up—the cause of the abolition of wage-slavery—and the Richmond, Va., *News-Leader* records, in its issue of the 14th instant, the fact that it has learned nothing.

Two members of the Socialist Labor Party having appeared on the streets of Richmond on an agitation tour, attempted to speak. They were arrested in good old ante-bellum fashion; were “tried”; were found guilty in approved ante-bellum style; were sentenced to pay a fine or to be locked up; refused to pay; went to prison; and the Richmond *News-Leader*, commenting on the incident, repeats, in the stereotyped style of sixty years ago: “It is all very fine to talk about the Constitution, guaranteeing certain rights—but.”

No “buts” will stand. Free speech is a conquest of civilization. Only enthroned Wrong need, can, or does fear it. The enthroned Wrong of chattel slavery could not bear free speech. Free speech uncovered the hideous farms of West Virginia on which Negroes were raised as cattle are raised—for the slave market. Free speech uncovered the shocking “morality” of a commonwealth cornerstoned upon chattel slavery. Free speech uncovered the ulcer, brought the word of hope to the blacks in the South, and finally marshalled the forces that uprooted that social crime. All the while the press and spokesmen of the “sacred institution” yelled and screeched—as

the Richmond *News-Leader* now yells and screeches at the “disorderly conduct” of the S.L.P. agitators who presumed to proclaim the gospel of Socialism on the streets of Richmond.

The Richmond *News-Leader* has learned nothing. Perhaps it may not be quite so dense sixty years after capitalism shall have met its Appomattox.

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

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