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EDITORIAL

WHY SCANDALIZED?

By DANIEL DE LEON

STARTING with the New York *Sun*—or closing with it—a number of Republican and Democratic papers are declaring themselves scandalized over the Edward W. Vanderbilt case.

Why scandalized?

Edward W. Vanderbilt is a rich Kings County man, who, taking a fancy to a spiritualistic medium, a Mrs. Pepper, married her, “in holy wedlock” as these same papers would sanctimoniously put it. Preserving, after marriage, the same esteem that he had for Mrs. Pepper before marriage (not a common thing, it must be admitted, with the property-holding class), this Vanderbilt conveyed to his wife some of his lands. The act was distasteful to Vanderbilt’s daughter by a former marriage. The lady considered the act insane; started proceedings in lunacy against her father; sought, upon that ground, to deprive him of the control of his property; and her first steps met with success. Vanderbilt was declared mentally incapacitated upon an inquisition before a jury; the determination was confirmed by the Supreme Court; and a former Kings County Judge was appointed a committee of Vanderbilt’s property. The righteous daughter did not stop there. She instituted criminal proceedings against her step-mother and succeeded in getting her indicted for larceny on the ground of her having accepted her husband’s conveyances. Things had gone on so far, when the current turned. The District Attorney of Kings County had the indictment against Mrs. Vanderbilt dismissed as unwarranted, and at about the same time the adjudication of lunacy against Vanderbilt was set aside and a new inquiry ordered, with the result that he was pronounced to be in his full senses, and the Court ordered the committee to restore his property to him: No sooner was Vanderbilt rehabilitated than bills began to pour in upon him. The three commissioners in the lunacy proceedings put in a bill for \$750 each; a bill for \$3,000

allowance and \$1,886.20 costs and disbursements came from his daughter's attorney; a bill for \$1,875.80 from the stenographer; and finally a bill for \$1,193.85 from the committee of his property while he was under the adjudication of lunacy. This is the case.

Why scandalized, we ask once more?

It is not man that rules property, it is property that rules man. Laws, morals, conduct—all are governed by property under a social system of private property in the means of production. By an inevitable chain of cause and effect, where the means of production are private, property becomes inaccessible to the many, and as a consequence, the necessity for property shapes views. A daughter will honestly consider her father insane if he does not leave it all to her; commissioners in lunacy, lawyers, stenographers, etc., will find their account in fomenting proceedings that bring them fees. It is all “in the cards.”

It is with the laws of capitalist property as with a protective tariff. If everybody is protected then none is. For a protective tariff to protect some, it must leave others unprotected. So with the laws of capitalist property. If the laws of capitalism protected everybody then none could get along. For anyone to get along a whole lot must be left to the tender mercy of others.

Such is the morality that capitalism breeds. Why be scandalized if the bramble bush pricks?

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

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