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EDITORIAL

HARRIMANIANA.

By DANIEL DE LEON

FROM the crop of biographies of the late E.H. Harriman a few passages are worth reproduction and attention—

“Edward Henry Harriman was born in poverty on February 25, 1848. At the age of twelve years he was placed at a college where the sons of Episcopal clergymen were given free tuition. . . . At the age of twenty-two he bought a seat on the stock exchange.”—A seat on the Stock-Exchange is a seat in the Council of “Captains of Industry.” Captainship of Industry is claimed to be a sort of by-the-grace-of-God affair. If so, why buy it? On the other hand, if the place has to be bought, then the Socialist principle is proved once more—a man is not a capitalist because he is a Captain of Industry; ’tis the other way; he is a Captain of Industry by virtue of his being a capitalist.

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{“}Edward Henry Harriman was the son of Orlando Harriman, an Episcopal minister at Hempstead, L.I. . . . Harriman perceived that the future of capital in the United States was bound up in the railroads, and that an immense fortune would fall to the man who could keep pace with the railroad development of the country and, like Jay Gould and Fisk, be on hand at the moment of his rival’s distress.”—The perpetual croak, solemnly croaked by the moralists of capitalism is that religious education is essential to the making of a lad, without which education his other attainments will only tend to make him a scamp. Harriman’s career pricks a hole into the theory. Either “to be on hand at the moment of your rivals’ distress” is a moral act—and then the less we have of that morality the better; or, it is an immoral act—and then the morality taught by the “religious atmosphere” proves itself not proof against material necessities. Socialist principle proved once more. He who seriously aims at promoting morality must first furnish the material foundation therefor. To preach morality and coquet with capitalism justifies the strongest suspicions against the moralist—indeed, such conduct is a proof of the controlling power of material needs.

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{“}Mr. Harriman was a great man. . . . That his undertakings were too vast for any one intellect, and that their colossal proportions cut short his life is probably true.”—Granted that Harriman was a man of genius, and granted also that the nature of his work, the concentration of the roads, is a valuable service to society, the obviously premature death of the man again demonstrates Socialism. The nature of the directive forces, which modern production demands, places such forces beyond the power of private, and requires the power of public bodies. Granted what the biographer of Harriman says in this respect, then Harriman’s real mission on earth was to warn society against leaving its house in such a disordered condition that the individual has to undertake the task and perish, leaving the task unfinished. Which is exactly what Socialism warns against.

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

Uploaded by Donna Bills, October 2010

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