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EDITORIAL

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE arrest in New Castle, Pa., of the publishers of the Socialist party paper *Free Press* and of *Solidarity*, a private venture of some supporters of the Trautmann-St. John so-called I.W.W., for violation of the State law which requires journalistic publications to carry the publishers' names conspicuously in each issue, is an occurrence that will furnish, as already it has furnished, grist to the mill of scatter-brained wholesale denouncers of "bourgeois law," but will cause every well-balanced militant in the Socialist or Labor Movement rather to gather encouragement from the evidence that, all the disorders notwithstanding that the flesh of bourgeois society is heir to, we live not to-day wholly in the jungles, but that our generation are the heirs of a vast amount of the experience necessary to distinguish between Freedom and License, and to realize that Progress is not possible without Order, nor Order possible without RESPONSIBILITY.

A Free Press—the printed manifestation of free thought and free speech—is one of the greatest achievements of modern times. Around the term cluster some of the most inspiring efforts of the human race. The conflict back of the term teems with revelations on the workings of the human mind. A Free Press is the thrice-repured grain ground by the opposing millstones of the Autocrat's FIAT and the individual's LAMPOON. From the thorny nettle of the two extremes—Repression and Anonymous License—the elite of the race's mind have plucked the flower Free Press.

Much is condensed in the term; volumes of the world's history. These may, in turn, be compressed into two principles—

Unshackled right to print one's thoughts;

Strict accountability for the exercise of the right.

From the latter flows what might be termed a third principle—the reprobation

of Anonymity.

As injurious to society as is the tyranny of the Censorship, is also the license of the Anonymous Utterance. While the former and the latter may be children of different parents, yet hardly any difference exists between the wound inflicted upon society by the gag, and the wound inflicted by the anonymous thrust. There is redress against neither. The one presents the mailed fist of Tyranny; the other is the inaccessible, intangible, elusive Backbiter.

The laws of this State, evidently the laws of Pennsylvania also, have wisely provided against both evils. The freedom of the press is guaranteed by constitution; the safety of the individual is protected by provisions that render a publication responsible for what it says; and, with a view hereto, demands that a paper publish in a permanent and conspicuous place the name of some person or persons upon whom the responsibility can be enforced. These regulations the New Castle publications violated.

No honor can come to the Labor or Socialist Movement, but disgrace only, from an attitude that is tantamount to a denial of Free Press, while pretending to howl in its defence. Free Press, like Free Speech, are creatures of Civilization; they are not the spawn of Savagery. While the fiction of law, to the effect that all are presumed to know it, may work injustice, no injustice can be worked upon men, who step forward with the claim of being promoters of a higher Social Order, by expecting of them that they come at least equipped with the knowledge of the healthful experience of the race. One of these is the reprobation of anonymous journalism.

The arrested publishers and Editors of the New Castle papers can now no better serve the Cause that they claim to have at heart than quickly to plead guilty in token of having sinned unintentionally; and, rising to the dignity of the Social Revolution, in whose field they claim to labor, frankly apologize to the Genius of the class-conscious Proletariat, on whose brow shines the star of Progress, Order, Responsibility.

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