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EDITORIAL

## THE MEASURE OF FREEDOM.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**O**N the occasion of the farewell banquet given to Dr. Karl Liebknecht last Monday night in Brooklyn, the distinguished visitor to America is reported by *The Call* of November 29, under the caption “What ‘Our’ Freedom Means,” to have said:

“Does not freedom in America mean freedom to rob and to exploit—freedom on the part of capitalism to crush out the lives of the workers mercilessly, ruthlessly?”

Obedient to the principle that a half truth is the worst of untruths, the above passage, surely true as far as it goes, embodies a harmful sociologic half-truth. That all there is of “‘Our’ Freedom” is not the bourgeois freedom to rob and exploit and to crush out the lives of the workers mercilessly and ruthlessly, happens to be exemplified, in this instance, in the very person of the German comrade who uttered the words. He is at the close of a two months’ tour throughout the land, in the course of which he freely castigated the ruling class of America in language, the truthfulness and the emphasis of which the words just quoted from him are a sample. And yet he was left alone, unmolested. Never a policeman ordered his meetings to disband; never an order from the authorities commanded him to leave the country. Would the same privilege have been enjoyed by an American Socialist in the German Empire, or even by a native? To ask the question is to answer it—and thereby to point to a vast domain of Freedom that IS “Ours,” and, thereby, to guard against a serious error in social development.

There is an error, shared even in quarters from which better things should be expected, that raises Suffering to the dignity of a social gauge. According to the error, social progress, including freedom, is to be measured by the volume of Suffering extant. According to the error, a diminishing volume of Suffering goes in even tread and step with progress and freedom. According to the error, the scale in

which two countries are to be measured is the scale of the Suffering experienced in each—the one that has less Suffering being freer than the one that has more.—A colossal blunder, fruitful of many and serious others.

The measure of a country's freedom is not the volume of Suffering to its credit; it is the OPPORTUNITY that country affords for final Freedom. There is, in point of fact, less Suffering among the Hottentots than there is in the German Empire, this notwithstanding, the German Empire is immeasurably in advance of Hottentotia in point of freedom. Why? Because the social institutions of the Empire are so much nearer the point where the Socialist Republic can be reached than are the primitive conditions of Hottentotia. Similarly, there is in all probability less Suffering in the German Empire than there is in the United States, this notwithstanding the United States is visibly in advance of the German Empire in point of freedom—as the untrammelled free speech enjoyed by Liebknecht demonstrates. Why? Just because conditions in totally non-feudal and absolutely capitalist United States are so much nearer the point where the opportunity exists for reaching the final freedom of the Socialist Republic than are conditions in still semi-feudal and only semi-capitalist German Empire.

The Sufferings of a ruled class change, they are not abolished by a change of rulers, even tho' the change of rulers be a step forward toward the possibility of the abolition of class-rule. Under each advancing social order of class-rule there are different modes of Sufferings, each social order of class-rule having its own brand of iniquity, some of which may be more galling even than the brand of some lower order of class-rule. For all this, the measure of freedom increases, as exemplified in Liebknecht's experience, in the measure that a country's opportunities are ripe for achieving the Socialist Commonwealth.

And well it is to keep the fact in mind—lest Socialist efforts be turned awry from the practical to the sentimental channels—lest Socialist standards, fit for one place, be wasted in other places for which they are unfit.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.  
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[slpns@slp.org](mailto:slpns@slp.org)