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EDITORIAL

## AN OPEN LETTER TO CHARLES EDWARD RUSSELL, NEW YORK.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**D**EAR Sir—

While heartily applauding your indignation, published in the *New York Call* of February 24, at the treatment given by the authorities of Lawrence to Joseph J. Ettor, we venture to ask whether such indignation, when it amounts to the straining at a gnat on the part of a leading member of the Socialist party after it has swallowed a camel, is not more likely to do harm than good by the unenvious contrast that the indignation suggests.

In a Nevada penitentiary there lingers in a felon's cell a man by the name of Morrie Preston. The facts in Preston's case are not disputed. They are indisputable.

Preston was doing picket duty in Goldfield before the restaurant of an employer against whom his Union was on strike. One day the employer, Silva by name, rushed out of his premises with a gun, pointing it at Preston. Preston drew his pistol and shot the man dead. For this act he was convicted of murder and sentenced for life. Those are the facts essential to the case.

The right of self-defence, proportionate to the assault, is a civic right of the citizen. Silva had attacked Preston with a deadly weapon. Was Preston justified, in self-defence, to kill his assailant?

The burglar who breaks into a house, and is attacked with a gun by the owner, and shoots the owner down is not guiltless. On the contrary. He is guilty under aggravating circumstances. The act of killing his assailant was an act in protection of guilt.



CHARLES EDWARD RUSSELL  
(1860-1941)

On the contrary, the wayfarer in pursuit of his avocation, who is attacked with a deadly weapon, and kills his assailant is guiltless. The act of killing his assailant was an act in defence of personal rights, hence legitimate.

The two instances establish the principle at law, equity and common sense.

Whether Preston was guilty or not is a question pivoted upon the legality or illegality of that at which he was active at the time of the killing. If he was guilty then picketing is a crime. If picketing is not a crime then Preston was guiltless.

To the Capitalist, it is of prime importance to brand picketing criminal. If the thing can not be done directly, then let it be done indirectly. By convicting Preston of murder, picketing was indirectly entered in the Criminal Code.

To the Socialist, it is of equal importance to uphold the legality of picketing. If picketing is a legitimate exercise of civic rights the right of self-defence goes with it.

The conviction of Preston was a blow aimed at the right of Unionism. The blow was dealt over the back of Preston. If he was guilty, then he had no right to defend himself when murderously assaulted. If he had no such right, then picketing is a crime. If picketing is a crime then the Union is a spiked gun for spiders to weave their webs over, and birds to hop upon. If the Union is allowed to be made a spiked gun of, then Socialism becomes a literary abstraction for idle minds to toy with. Condensing the language of Marx—No Union, no Socialist political party and no Social Revolution.

Obviously, a principle of prime magnitude to the Socialist Movement was involved in the case of Preston. In homage to that principle the Socialist Labor Party nominated Preston in 1908 its candidate for the Presidency. This notwithstanding, with one accord the press of your, the Socialist party echoed the cry of the bourgeois press—"A Murderer nominated for President";—with one accord, accordingly, the press of your party accepted and echoed the bourgeois theory which flowed from considering Preston guilty. Quaintest of all, not only did the very paper in which your protest over Ettor's treatment now appears, use the identical language, but Mr. Joshua Wanhope, at the time an employe of Wilshire and now one of the editorial writers on that very *Call*, favored the arch-capitalist *Evening Post* of this city with an interview in which, apart from the regulation S.P. improprieties against the S.L.P., and the Editor of the *Daily People*, he Pecksniffianly shrugged his shoulders

at Preston and his nomination.

Ettor is certainly innocent. All the facts in the case point to the American Woolen Company as the real instigator of the riot of January 28 in Lawrence, and the real culprit in the death of Anna Lopizzo. For all that, the farce of Ettor's arrest, while it is a serious violation of the justice, as you correctly put it, involves no principle of the magnitude involved in the tragedy of Preston's life imprisonment. Against the latter there is not a word heard; only against the former, on the part of S.P. men. Is not that the swallowing of a camel and then the straining at a gnat—thereby not merely aggravating the wrong that the Socialist party does to the cause of Socialism, but practically cloaking the lesser wrong?

EDITOR DAILY PEOPLE.

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