

EDITORIAL

## STERILIZATION.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**T**HE class struggle in Oregon may be expected speedily to take a nervously vicious turn. The impulse to the turn will come from the bill which was enacted into law last February for the “sterilization of criminals.”

“Sterilization” is clear enough,—it needs no interpretation. There will be little, if any, difference in the interpretation of the word by the executors thereof.

But what about “criminals”? Will the interpretation of that word be as uniform?

Even he who never pondered over the “Spirit of the Law,” enough to philosophize upon the subject, must have acquired some perception of the fact that laws mean different things to different people. The difference proceeds from the interpreter. Whatever word is subject to interpretation will be differently interpreted; and statutes are elastic enough under class-rule legislation to back up any interpretation. It is so with the word “criminals.”

To a Legislature composed of the employing class and its lieutenants, there is no act—outside of dumb submission and perpetual toil—on the part of the employed or working class, imaginable that does not violate, by injuring, the sacrosanct rights of Capitalism, hence, that is not criminal. One need not mention a demand for higher wages, or lower hours, let alone the aggravated manifestations of ungodliness, hence, criminality, involved in the strike and the boycott. To speak to a neighboring fellow worker in the shop; to sneeze; to laugh; to visit the lavatory more than once a day, or stay there beyond a minute or so;—these are, everyone of them, acts that reduce the employer’s profits by reducing the employe’s out-put, hence, are criminal. Indeed, these and many other such acts have already stepped into the vestibule of the existing Criminal Code—the shop’s lists of finable acts. The wholesale sterilization of the workers is but a natural application of the Sterilization Law, as

interpreted by the capitalist class.

But that's not the end of it.

The process can not fail to react back. Altho,' as a class, the worker has never yet realized his class interests, it is in the cards that the Sterilization Law will rouse him to action. The struggle will be for control of the interpreting branches of government. At first the control will be striven for by the worker as a matter of physical self-defence. From that, to proceed to the offensive is but a step. Once having vested himself with the power to interpret, nothing more natural than for the worker to interpret and thus pronounce criminal the thousand and one acts whereby the capitalist enriches himself—his exploitation and thereby dwarfing of the child; his exploitation and thereby crippling of the mother; his exploitation of the male proletariat and thereby consigning the workers to early graves; his scheming of swindles, such as “profit sharing,” “pensions” and “bonuses” for “faithful employees”; his keeping down the supply of desirable things for the sake of keeping up prices, even destroying the supply when it has been produced; his prostitution of his female employes; his cheating with shoddy; his corrupt political practices; etc.; etc.; etc. Crimes are committed by criminals. Having interpreted as “criminal” the acts upon which the capitalist now plumes himself, the capitalist becomes a “criminal”—and, as such, a proper subject for sterilization.

Nor will the nervous strain be limited to these, the two leading classes. There is the middle class. Already did their spokesman, Gov. Waite of Colorado, declare, about seventeen years ago, his intention to ride up to the bridle of his horse in the blood of the “Gold Bugs.” Sterilization will be a simpler process. The horse need not be soiled with the gore of the “Gold Bugs.”

And there you have it. Already the tension of the economic class struggle is intense. With sterilization as its manifestation and ultimate object, the nervous strain upon the Oregonian warring classes will turn the State into a howling wilderness of neurotic wild cats.

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