

Prince and Proletaire (April 1902)

The two types represented in the above caption are brought into haggard contrast by the visit of Prince Henry¹ to our democratic domain and the hysterical demonstrations that assail him as he is whirled from point to point in his royal carousal among the plebians. According to reports the royalty of the old world has been totally eclipsed by the democracy of the new, and his deputy imperial majesty is fairly dazzled and bewildered by the fast and furious display in his honor. At the opera in New York he was surrounded by a palpitating wall of nude flesh ablaze with diamonds — a scene of gorgeous, glittering splendor compared with which the courts of kings are dim as dirt.

And this is but an incident among a thousand in which our democratic (?) people of every rank and station, save socialistic alone, abase themselves in the vulgar fawning at the feet of tyranny. Shall the titled snob be blamed for holding all such flunkeys in contempt?

Who is this royal lion in the democratic den? A total stranger from an alien land. What has he done to command the reverence of a god? Ask yourself if you can answer. It is not then to the man — for he's unknown — but to the prince that Uncle Sam gets down full length into the dust and spreads the Stars and Stripes for royal feet to tread upon.

What difference is there between the monarchy of William² and the republic of Roosevelt? Can the Lick telescope³ discover it?

Bear in mind that here “we” are the people; “we” live in “the land of the free and home of the brave”; “we” have no classes; “we” scorn royal snobs; “we” love liberty and despise display; “we” hold “divine right to rule in contempt; “we” — Rats!

The simple truth is we are like the rest — we have prince and pauper, power and poverty, money and misery in our capitalist monarchy across the water.

Chauncey M. Depew has 150 pairs of creased trousers; many of his sovereign constituents have patches on their only pair of pants.

In our great Eastern cities more than half the people live in tenements unfit for habitation, and thousands of babes, denied fresh air, die every year.

The sweating dens are packed with human vermin, but Henry, by the grace of God, will not behold the reeking ballast of the “ship of state.”

A few rods⁴ from the Waldorf in New York and the Auditorium in Chicago are the districts of the doomed and damned. The squares of squalor and miles of misery inspire in men, instead of “Hoch der Kaiser,”⁵ the wish “to hear the nightingale sing new marseillaises”⁶ and revive the ominous notes of “La Carmagnole.”⁷

Thus fares the land, by luxury betrayed;
In nature’s simplest charms at first arrayed,
But verging to decline, its splendors rise,
Its vistas strike, its palaces surprise;
While, scourged by famine from the smiling land,
The mournful toiler⁸ leads his humble band;
And while he sinks, without one arm to save,
The country blooms — a garden and a grave.⁹

Not long ago the millionaires and labor leaders had a feast in New York; they met as one, and declared that henceforth they were “one and inseparable, now and forever.” President Roosevelt ratified the compact by dining the leaders at the White House. But where are labor’s representatives to the Prince Henry banquets and receptions? Have they been lost in the shuffle? Can it be that they are not fit to meet a prince? Hush, dolt! This is a republic — labor here is royal and wears the imperial crown. So, at least, Mr. Hanna and other poor and oppressed capitalists tell us, and surely they should know the working kings who rule them.

But again, where are the representatives of labor at these courtly social functions? Why is no American workingman allowed near the prince except as menial and spaniel, to guard his noble majesty and do slavish obeisance to his every whim?

Why is there no inch of room for labor in any house or hall, or park, or boat in all this vaunted Republic when a “prince” is guest?

Why are the working class excluded from such “public” functions as rigidly as if they wore the stripes of convicts?

Why must a prince be guarded?

On “great occasions,” such as the presence of a royal guest, the streets and alleys are reserved for the working class, and in these thoroughfares the dead-lines of the common herd are guarded with policemen’s clubs.

How melancholy to see shivering humans, packed together like cattle in a car, rend one another in mad strife to honor those who look upon them as unclean and hold them in supreme contempt!

The working class of the United States, with few exceptions, cheered and shouted for the prince as though he had been their lord and savior. He cares no more for them, this pampered prince, than if they were so many sheep or swine, for he believes that royal blood, by God’s decree, flows through his veins and that common humans are but beasts of burden.

Not long ago Ben Tillett came from England as the representative of labor.¹⁰ All his life he worked to help the men of toil. In point of honest worth Ben Tillett far outweighs ten thousand blooded princes. Yet workingmen, except the few, ignored him, and the scant regard they showed him is to their disgrace.

The point I make is that from the time the ship that brought the prince touched our shore until it left again no workingman was tolerated in any banquet or reception tendered him in the name of the American people. Office-holders and politicians spouted, while capitalists lined the tables and wined and dined themselves — all of which simply proves that there are no classes in the United States, and that socialism has no business in a republic.

The envoys for the coronation of King Edward have been announced by President Roosevelt. There will be no horny-handed prince of labor there. Whitelaw Reid,¹¹ known for being the opposite of Horace Greeley, and as small as he was great, will be our central knee-breech figure at the crowning of King Edward.

Of course it would not be consisted for our president to drop a crumb of comfort to the Boers.¹²

Let it not be understood that I have the slightest feeling against Henry of Prussia; it is the prince I have no use for. Personally, he may be a good fellow, and I am inclined to believe he is, and if he were in trouble and I had it in my power to help he would find in me a friend. the amputation of his title would relieve him of his royal affliction and elevate him to the dignity of man.

This is a necessary part of the mission of socialism, and the revolutionary movement is sweeping over the United States as well as Germany.

It means the ends of princes, the end of paupers, and the beginning of Man.

To ears attuned, the victor's shouts
Are crossing o'er the sea;
Resounding like Jove's thunder peals;
The working class are free.¹³

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¹ Prince Henry of Prussia (1862-1929) was younger brother of Kaiser Wilhelm II, the son of Kaiser Frederick III (1831-1888) and British Queen Victoria's eldest daughter. A graduate of the German naval academy, Henry was the commander-in-chief of the Baltic fleet during World War I.

² Kaiser Wilhelm II ("King William," 1859-1941) was the last emperor of Imperial Germany. He ascended to the throne in 1888 upon the death of his father, Kaiser Frederick III, and remained as ruler until his abdication in November 1918.

³ The James Lick Telescope was built in 1888 and featured a massive 36-inch lens. Installed on Mount Hamilton in California's Santa Clara County, the unit remains the third largest refracting telescope in the world today.

⁴ A rod is a unit of archaic British measurement, equal to 5.5 yards.

⁵ "Hoch der Kaiser" was a nationalistic slogan meaning "Up with the Kaiser."

⁶ The reference is obscure. "La Marseillaise" was the national anthem of revolutionary France.

⁷ "La Carmagnole" was, together "La Marseillaise," an extremely popular anthem of the French Revolution.

⁸ The original poem reads "peasant," silently changed by Debs.

⁹ From "The Deserted Village" (1770), by Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774).

¹⁰ Ben Tillett (1860-1943) was a Fabian socialist who helped found the Independent Labour Party and who was active in the dock and transport workers' unions.

¹¹ Whitelaw Reid (1837-1912) was Horace Greeley's successor at the helm of the *New York Tribune*. A staunch Republican, Reid served as vice-president of the United States during William McKinley's first term in office.

¹² The Boers were Afrikaans-speaking whites, descended from the Dutch, who farmed and mined in South Africa. From 1899 to 1902 they fought a defensive war with surprising tenacity against the superior forces of the British Empire.

¹³ Original source of this poem could not be located.