

Editorial: Wiman's Case

The arrest, indictment and conviction for forgery of ERASTUS WIMAN, the quondam millionaire and “captain of industry,” has been received with a loud clapping of hands by two very different elements in our social system.

One element is composed, strange as it may seem and yet logically enough, of his own class. Men, who, like WIMAN himself, lead the life of refined highway robbers, feel constrained, when one of their ilk is caught, to turn suddenly upon him, denounce him, raise their skirts, hold up their noses and pass him by on the other side—all for the purpose of inducing the belief that they are better than their caught pal.

The other element consist of the cruel and ignorant. Men, who themselves would be highway robbers if they only had the daring necessary; men, who, in this anarchic and bunco system, admire and hate the successful swindler; men, who are too ignorant to realize that the well-being of the individual can not be permanently established at the cost of anyone, but can come about only through the well-being of all; men, in short, whose hearts and whose intellects are yet steeped in the pitch and darkness of capitalist thought, though themselves the victims of it.

The SOCIALIST can join neither element. In sight of ERASTUS WIMAN—the husband and father—proved to be infamous, and consigned to a felon’s cell, only sorrow can be produced; nevertheless, the SOCIALIST approaches the case serenely and with that superior charity that animates the physician, who, out of evil, out of sickness, out of death, would draw the lesson that may insure good, health and life.

Daniel De Leon

Who is there among the “captains of industry,” the millionaire, capitalist or plutocratic class, who, if he had his deserts, should not be consigned to the penitentiary along with WIMAN? Crime of some sort or other—as shown by their fear of the income tax—is at the bottom of and holds their wealth together. These men are a center of contagion. Like FALSTAFF, who was, not only witty himself, but the cause that wit was in others, they are not only criminal themselves, but the cause that crime is in others. All intellectually and morally weak people try to emulate them. But if these people are dangerous as a class, those individuals among them who set themselves up as samples to imitate, and who go about lecturing to our youth with themselves as the misleading object lesson, are a thousand times more dangerous.

WIMAN was of this sort. A reputed wealth man and possessed of the veneration of morality, he mounted the public platform and lectured on how to succeed in life. His talk, backed by his appearance, was a denial of the truth of SOCIALISM. The lie of capitalism was covered up, not by his language only, but by his well clad, well fed and decent looks. “I was poor,” he would say, “but push, perseverance, thrift, industry and enterprise have made me rich. Go ye, and do likewise.” Now we know, down to the very details, what was the nature of the virtues that made WIMAN” succeed.” Theoretically it could not be otherwise, now the facts prove the theory.

Sad as WIMAN’S fate is, it may be the cause of much popular happiness. In the measure in which his downfall should remove from the masses the superstition that happiness can be securely raised in a social system reared upon crime, in that measure will they be enlightened to join the Socialists in their effort to overthrow the capitalist system.

ERASTUS WIMAN may not have lived and been a “captain of industry” in vain.

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*A De Leon editorial transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the Official
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