

EDITORIAL

## AND THAT'S CALLED "ETHICAL CULTURE"!

By DANIEL DE LEON

**S**Ocialists were the first to point out the fact that modern industry was only a roundabout cannibalism, and not a very refined cannibalism at that. The capitalist class drain the blood and marrow, life and soul out of the working class. This state of affairs, the inhumanity of it, the brutality of it, the gross injustice of it, has struck many, but they have either dodged the question, or else treated it with indifference. But at times it is as well to dodge or to ignore as it is to try to explain without first understanding, and it is far better to dodge and ignore than it is to excuse or to palliate. Yet there are men who will rise up, principally in meeting, and twist and wind through a maze of excuses that is as dishonest as it is ineffective.

Such a man is Felix Adler, and such is the action of the man. Sunday he spoke before the Society of Ethical Culture, and he chose for his subject "The Spiritual Life of the Poor." On this he builds a most amazing theory. It is all as though one anaconda from among many anacondas should arise and tell his sinuous brethren that when they swallowed a lamb, it would be more anacondarian if they did it easily, and gently. Then it could be said to those of lamb-eating tendencies that their actions were the result, not of their mode of life, not of what their tastes might be, not what the necessity of the conditions under which they lived might compel them to do, but that far away, in lands of the North, East, South, or West, carpet snakes ate flies, and sometimes feasted on one another.

Mr. Adler saw that wholesale wrong was being done, so he pronounced himself as follows: "We in America must pay the penalties for crimes of oppression committed in Europe centuries ago." Literally that sentence means nothing, by implication it means that the poor in this country are oppressed, not by the capitalist class of this country, not by the capitalist government of this country, but

by the governments of European countries, and by the people of those countries, and that the fleecing capitalists of America are simply martyrs.

Farther on Mr. Adler says in speaking of inventions: "He (the European immigrant) easily falls a victim of designing men and rogues, who sap the profits properly his, and the young inventor finds himself reduced to penury and want." Because these men, in the majority of cases born here in this country, are under the baneful influence of Europe!

Mr. Adler's theory amounts to this: We oppress people in this country, but we do not wish to do so. We do it because in Europe those same people have been oppressed during several centuries. Yet to prove his point he brings forth the typical American point of invention stealing, which has been brought to its highest perfection in this country. Large corporations, whether they are the Steel Trust, the Consolidated and McKay's Shoe Machinery Trust, the Vaughn Currying Machine Trust, the Agricultural Machine Trust, etc., all take the inventions of those who enter their line, why? Mr. Adler says because in Europe things are thus. No small man can steal an invention and use it. It would be of as little good to him as it is to the inventor. To make it effective it must be stolen by a corporation. And the corporations, "pursued" by the wrong done in Europe, "suffering" from the crimes of others, paying the "penalties of foreign misdeeds," must go on stealing inventions, and as they steal these inventions from and plunder American workingmen, they must be willing subjects to the Mosaic law of punishing the sins of the fathers by punishing their children's children!

In that audience that listened to Felix Adler there were, perchance, keepers of sweatshops, proprietors of department stores, manufacturers, merchants, bankers, etc., all anxious for "ethical culture," and all eager to do something for the "spiritual life of the poor." They doubtlessly looked with contempt upon the men who did the "stunting," and who were "paying the penalty" for centuries of European wrong, yet were they not beneficiaries of capitalism it would not be worth the while of Felix Adler or his likes to appeal to them or to preach to them. Were they not beneficiaries of capitalism they would have to earn an honest living.

Mr. Adler's excuse is at once ridiculous and dishonest. It is ridiculous because it is inappropriate, and puts the thing it defends in a bad position. It is dishonest because it tries to shift onto other shoulders the results of our own wrong doings.

This is a capitalist country, and it is so far advanced that it does not have to take lessons in penny squeezing and labor fleecing from any European country. The workers here are in their present abject condition because they are robbed here. Mr. Adler excuses the robbery, and seeks for salves for the consciences of the plunderers in America.

And that is "Ethical Culture"!

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.  
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