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EDITORIAL

IS THIS FUNNY OR IS IT SERIOUS?

By DANIEL DE LEON

IN the correspondence column of this issue, and under the above head, publicity is given to the doings of United States Commissioner Alexander in this city.¹ The gentleman interrogates the witnesses who accompany applicants for their naturalization papers whether the applicant is a member of a “Socialist organization” and whether he believes in “murder,” etc.

There is a serious feature to such conduct. The Socialist Labor Party has been a recognized political party in this State for the last twelve years; during this period, here and in many other States of the Union, the party’s vote has been canvassed and reported the same as any other party’s. Making ample allowance for Commissioner Alexander’s ignorance, he can not be ignorant of that fact. When, accordingly, he interrogates a witness for naturalization papers whether the applicant is a Socialist, the Commissioner makes himself guilty of a serious

¹ CORRESPONDENCE.

Is This Funny or Is It Serious?

To the *Daily and Weekly People*.—To-day I, the undersigned, went before the United States District Commissioner, Th. Alexander, at the New York Postoffice, serving as a witness for an applicant for naturalization papers. After the application was made out we finally arrived before Commissioner Th. Alexander to be examined. Among other questions that I, as a witness, had to answer were:

“Is he (the applicant) opposed to organized government? Does he belong to any anarchist, nihilist or Socialist organization? Does he believe in killing or murdering any officer in the government of any country?” etc.

I answered “no” to all these questions. The applicant was not a member of the S.L.P. I conferred the favor of serving as his witness upon the assurance from a friend of is, an S.L.P. member, that he was not a Kangaroo, and that he would not with his vote assist in upholding the capitalist system.

I might also state that the questions were about the same to all the witnesses and applicants. I did not until shortly before our turn came, hear “Socialist” bracketed with “anarchism,” “killing” or “murdering.” I wore on my coat lapel a D.A. No. 49, S.T. & L.A. button, but I am not certain if it was that that had the magic effect upon the Commissioner to cause him to include “Socialist” in the questions.

David Alson.

New York, June 30, 1903.

misdemeanor. His bracketing of Socialism with “murder” and “killing” only adds the feature of a willful affront to an otherwise serious enough crime. Affronts are not remedial at law. But crime is. Moreover, seeing we are not living under Anarchy, where every man is a law unto himself, as Commissioner Alexander evidently would like, there are ways of calling this Jack-in-office to account, and making him behave, or ousting him. The serious part of the affair can and will be duly attended to.

But the affair also has its funny side. The simpleton of the proverb, who closes up the well after the child has fallen in, is not “in it” with Commissioner Alexander; not even the lunk-headed Mexican Governor of the former Mexican territory of Texas, who expressed the wish of keeping even the birds from crossing the Texas frontier from the side of the United States, is “in it” with our Commissioner. Our Commissioner is comparable only to the silly hen that has hatched out duck’s eggs among her own, and flutters all over at the sight of the goslings taking to their element and the water, and that thus imagines she can counteract the evolution that she herself has promoted. As a limb of capitalist Government, Commissioner Alexander has hen-like helped to hatch out Socialism in America. The thing is there. It will grow and spread right here as a native product, hatched by American capitalism into a vigor and luxuriance of power such as the Socialism of no country will be able to display. And there are our Commissioners Alexander clucking and fluttering like silly hens vainly seeking to undo their own work.

That is funny—to the Socialists; not to the Commissioners Alexander, who, differently from the hen, will not be simply ignored by triumphant Socialism, but will be put to the sad alternative of working or starving. Mayhap that’s why “Socialism” and “killing” are one in his mind.

All the more killingly funny.

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