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EDITORIAL

CHILLING AT ITS HEART.

By DANIEL DE LEON

MR. Leonard Courtney, a gentleman who enjoys the reputation of being a veteran English publicist, has an article in the *Monthly Review* in which he bewails what he calls the decline of Parliament within his recollection. Mr. Courtney's attitude is not that of an intelligent mourner at the death-bed of a friend or relative, who is dissolving under the decrepitude of old age; his attitude is that of a child that wails at the absence of robust companionship in the parent, now time-worn, who once assisted in the child's rompings.

Of course Parliament is declining in men of noble enthusiasm. So are all legislative bodies of capitalism. Inevitably so. Enthusiasm, the enthusiasm that breeds noble aspirations and thoughts and expresses these in eloquent speeches is possible only with a class that has its future before it, in other words, with a class that has a historic mission to fulfill. A class whose mission is done wilts. The mission of capitalism was stupendous. It was nothing short of bringing about the conditions for human freedom. Without the possibility of material wellbeing for all, slavery in some form or other is the lot of the masses. It was the mission of capitalism to develop and organize production in such manner as to assure the possibility of the material foundation for freedom. The noble task enobled the artisan. It bred conviction in his breast, it inspired his mind. Exhilarating was the work of striking the feudal shackles from society, doubly exhilarating the work of hurling the then tyrant from this throne, and every fibre tingled with the consciousness of importance. The mighty impulse produced titans and these appeared both within and without parliaments. Classic pages in George Eliot's works and in Eugene Sue's notable *History of a Proletarian Family* attest to the inspired labors of that generation on the seemingly humble field of economics, while history, as reflected on the more conspicuous field of politics, records their feats in

parliaments. That was the period of capitalist virility, and it extended down to the middle of last century. Since then the decline set in. The task of capitalism was performed; its mission was at end.

As many a man survives his usefulness, and the decrepitude of old age is then but a hindrance to his successors, so with capitalism. Its actual task fulfilled, capitalism now lingers on the stage, attendant of the moment when its successor, Socialism, shall take the reins. No wonder there is atrophy in the modern parliament. When ever did senility inspire the human heart and mind? Senility looks backward, it is crotchety, it palsies. For the one-time zeal of the capitalist revolutionist we must look to the Socialist camp. The divine spark has passed to it.

Mr. Leonard Courtney's wail is no credit to his understanding. To the Socialist ear, however, the wail is music. It has the effect of the deep note of the muffled rumblings of the rising tide, rising over slowly shelving banks by the glimmer of breaking dawn, accompanied by the whisperings of the soft inshore breeze on a clear, promiseful spring morning. The symptoms of the approach of Socialism multiply. For one thing, capitalism is being chilled at its heart.

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

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slpns@slp.org