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EDITORIAL

THAT "PARISIAN WITTICISM".

By DANIEL DE LEON

VIOLENT was the rage of some of the delegates at last year's national convention of the Guesde-Vaillant French Socialists, held in Lille, France, at the resolution introduced on the subject of the general strike. The matter had been debated during the better part of an afternoon, and a committee, consisting of Guesde, Lafargue and several others was appointed to draw up a resolution that should embody the sense of the convention. The resolution presented the next morning by the committee certainly did. But it failed to suit all the delegates. It contained a clause that "got upon the nerves" of some. That was the clause that referred to the general strike as "a strike, more or less general." This particular passage caused great irritation in some quarters. It was assailed as a "Parisian witticism". No wonder the words irritated some of the delegates. The "witticism", whether so meant or not, was a bit of caustic satire. It exposed the looseness with which the term "general strike" is generally used, and how a serious matter may be rendered the subject of ridicule by heedless use. The despatches that are now running in from St. Paul, Minn., on the telegraphers' strike on the Great Northern and Northern Pacific Railroads would have furnished Guesde, Lafargue and the talented delegate from Bordeaux, who also took a conspicuous part in the debate, with forceful arguments in favor of the "witticism".

From St. Paul comes the news that the telegraphers on the above named roads are out on "a general strike"; simultaneous with that despatch, however, comes the tidings that "95 per cent." of the operators are out; and then that the roads are running on schedule time; and then, as if to cap the climax and add edge to the already edgeful enough witticism, that the companies have "locked out" the operators, and the President of the operators "has appealed" to the Presidents of the companies!

The general strike is the culmination of the Socialist Revolution. Revolutions are born like children, full shaped, and they don't "appeal". A partial general strike is as contradictory a term as piecemeal birth. When the hour shall have sounded for the general strike in America, it will not be the employers who will be locking out the employes, but the employes who will be locking out the employers. The scab stage, or crude stage, when an industry like that of the railroads can have its trains running "on schedule time", or on any employers' time whatever, and when the leaders of the "general strikers" appeal to the employer, is a stage of greenness, or unripeness, that precludes the bare idea of the general strike as completely as the first month's gestation precludes the idea of birth. As in the latter, so only abortion is possible in the former.

There is but a step from the sublime to the ridiculous. The "Parisian witticism" concerning a "strike, more or less general" is being furnished with fresh swing by the locked-out and appealing telegraphers now on "general strike" on the on-schedule-running railroad lines of the North West.

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

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