

## **Another Instance of Old Trade Union Incapacity**

*By Daniel De Leon*

*I believe employers have rights as well as employees.*

—George E. McNeil, *The Carpenter*, May 1893

Who are the modern employers, to what economic class do they belong? They are, and belong to, that class that is in possession of the machinery of production—land and capital—without which civilized man must perish. They are the capitalists.

Who are the employees, to what economic class do they belong? They are, and belong to, that class that is stripped of the machinery of production—land and capital—without which they are at the mercy of the class that owns these prerequisites to a living. They are the working people.

How did the capitalist, or modern employing class come to the ownership of the machinery of production? Through fraud and theft.

Whom did they defraud and rob? The working class.

How? Labor is the sole producer of all wealth. By returning to labor barely one-quarter of its own products and fleecing it of about three-quarters of what it produces, the capitalist or employing class piles up the wealth which it then turns upon labor as an instrument of further oppression. The employer or capitalist class is an idle, useless class, a parasite on the body economic and politic, the working class is the breadwinner for this robber class.

Why does the employee or working class not refuse to allow itself to be robbed by the employer? Because the employer, being in possession of the gates to bread and butter, can starve the employee into a “contract” whereby the latter submits to be robbed rather than die outright.

Is there any moral force at the bottom of such a transaction?

None! only might and brute force. The employer is buttressed up in the possession and enjoyment of his stolen goods by the powers of the government, which his bunco steerers cajole the people into placing in his hands. With the physical force powers of the state to guarantee his economic power, he stands before the working class like a highwayman before the traveler whom he waylays.

*Daniel De Leon*

Unless wrong—theft, fraud, chicanery and the whole catalogue of crimes—can be the basis of “rights,” the employer has not “rights” whatever.

The labor movement is directed towards redressing this wrong; its tenets are clear enunciations of the undeniable fact that the capitalist or employing class is fundamentally the enemy of the employee or working class, and vice versa; that the hostility between the two is irreconcilable; that the capitalist class has no legitimate functions whatever to fulfill; and that it has no right either to its stolen goods nor to existence—unless mankind is to be allowed to relapse into the barbarism of tyranny, from which it has been painfully trying to emancipate itself.

Only if drilled upon these principles can the classconsciousness of the working and oppressed classes be awakened; only then can they be made to perceive the solidarity of their interests; and only in proportion as they are clear upon these subjects are they seen to form a solid body, that nothing can break, and that pushes the enemy steadily to the wall.

That, on the other hand, there should still be so much disruption, disintegration and eternal breaking downs among certain branches of organized labor is the inevitable result of the preaching of the contrary doctrine by men within the ranks of labor. Mr. McNeil’s statement, at the head of this column, is an instance in point. That view, together with those of his associates in pure and simple trade unionism, Messrs. Gompers and Lennon—one of whom thinks capitalists are entitled to their profits under the present system, and the other of whom asserts that it is sophistry to claim that there is any antagonism between capitalists and workingmen—are all typical of the old school of trade unionism, or trade unionism pure and simple; they are the views that keep the working class in ignorance and divided; they are the views against which new trade unionism is arraigned.

Mr. McNeil’s “belief” was expressed in a speech delivered before workingmen at Worcester, Mass.; Mr. Gompers’ view was expressed in this city also before workingmen, although only a very few; Mr. Lennon’s assertion appears in the *Tailor*, a workingman’s paper. The harm these expressions do to the unguarded workingmen, who hear or read them, is incalculable. But still they have one redeeming feature: they serve to push the enlightened movement of new trade unionism, by revealing in ever clearer light the utter unfitness of the old trade unionists and pure and simplers to lead the battle of emancipation.

*The People*, June 11, 1893  
Socialist Labor Party