

Daniel De Leon

Editorial: Proving Our Case

The editor of the New York *Commercial Bulletin* publishes in his paper a three column minion address recently delivered by himself in Camden, S.C., and entitled “Social Inequalities, or The True Socialism.”

The gist of the address may be found in the following pregnant little passage:

If it be asked: “But why is the capitalist enabled to reserve to himself the lion’s share of the profits of his co-partnership with labor?” the answer is, because he is one of a very limited class whose special mental endowments enable them to render exceptional benefits to society; whilst the workman belongs to an immensely preponderant class of a relatively low order of earning capacity. If workmen were as competent for the creation and utilization of wealth as capitalists are, they would become wealthy; if capitalists had no more brains than the average workman, they would soon become relatively poor.

This is the pivot upon which the whole “philosophy” of the lecturer revolves.

The historic mission of the capitalist class was to concentrate the machinery of production; to develop the co-operative productivity of the race; and thereby to bring about the possibility of production upon a scale so large as to render want unnecessary, and, as a result, to render unnecessary the existence of classes, i.e., the exploitation of one class by another. It matters not at this moment what were the

Daniel De Leon

capabilities, whether of intellect or of heart, that qualified the capitalist, as a historic figure, for his task. For the sake of argument, let those capabilities have been of the highest order and most admirable temper. The question now is: “Has the capitalist any functions to perform to-day, does he perform any by virtue and as a result of which he appropriates a share of production so large that the lecturer admits it to be the lion’s share?”

There can be no doubt upon this subject. The stage of economic development we have reached is that of mammoth concentrations of capital, represented by corporations, syndicates and trusts. These are stock concerns. The capitalist purchases stock, locks this up and goes about. Frequently he does not even know where the factory, the railroad, or the mine is located in which his capital is invested; from top to bottom these concerns are run and managed by paid employes—by men “of a low order of earning capacity” as the lecturer claims; but regularly the dividends are paid; regularly the lion’s share of product is distributed among these stockholding capitalists. For what? Will any sane man claim that this happens as a reward for any mental endowments bestowed upon production? No! It is simply by virtue of the stock-holder’s OWNERSHIP of capital. He might have no more brain, and, as far as production is concerned, he has not, than a Papuan, and yet his dividends will accrue all the same.

Turning to the first page of the very issue of the *Commercial Bulletin* that contains this wonderful address, we count not less than 301 of these corporations, syndicates and trusts, whose stock is quoted; they cover railroad, telegraph, mining, steamship, express and all manner of industrial concerns. Capitalists become sharers in these undertakings so far as they have the money to invest in such stock, and so far only; they become sharers in railroad or in gas companies, or in both, or in all, not because they have any special mental endowments in these industries but because they own the necessary funds. Just as soon as the stock period of capitalism has been reached,

Proving Our Case

the capitalist has become a useless, idle being, a sponge on the body social, whose wealth is produced by labor exclusively, and almost exclusively appropriated by the capitalist.

To what extent it is true that the capitalist no longer renders any valuable services to society; that the work is actually performed by hired labor; and that the capitalist sucks up the lion's share, not because of any intellectual fitness on his part, but despite his intellectual unfitness and thanks only to his capital, even where he seems, to the uninitiated, to be directly connected with the undertaking, the editor of the *Commercial Bulletin* fitly illustrates in his own person.

The *Commercial Bulletin*, like all capitalist concerns, is a stock affair; the same as in a railroad corporation the largest stock holder elects the president, himself not infrequently, and this president attends to the bribing of Legislatures and such like non-productive work, while the real productive work of running the road is left to his wage slaves; so likewise does in a newspaper corporation the largest stock-holder usually give himself the title of "editor", but the real work is thrown upon intellectually fit paid employes, the chief stock-holder, or nominal editor, being as a rule a person equipped with as little intellectual fitness as the editor of the *Commercial Bulletin* shows himself to be. He is the chief and controlling stockholder of this concern; accordingly, he is the "editor"; but if he were the man upon whom the paper really depended for its patronage it would have burst long ago. But no, it lives—thanks to the labor of a class of people, who, this editor says, are "of a low earning capacity", and who are paid hire; while the lecturing editor, who is a well known ignoramus and could not earn his salt in any industry, let alone journalism, walks off with the lion's share.

The People, Vol. II, No. 51. Sunday, March 19, 1893

Proving Our Case

*A De Leon editorial transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the
Official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.*

Uploaded August 2002