

Daniel De Leon

Editorial: “Stolen Goods”

A correspondent, from whose letter we can not infer whether he is friend or foe, quotes certain pages from these columns in which the wealth of capitalists is referred to as “stolen goods,” and asks: “Do you mean this literally? Do you mean by ‘theft’ statute theft, or do you mean moral theft?”

We mean both.

By “statute theft,” as used by our correspondent, we understand crime for the punishment of which the penal code makes provision. We have yet to learn the name of a single capitalist—large landlord or capitalist proper—who has not acquired big chunks, if not the bulk of his property, by crimes for which the penal code provides punishments from over one year up to hanging or the electric chair.

By “moral theft,” as used by our correspondent, we understand crime for the punishment of which the existing penal codes, having been framed in the low atmosphere bred of capitalism, do not yet decree punishments, but which the superior light shed upon the acts of man by the existing higher economic development renders as felonious, if not more so, than any that have already found their way into the penal code.

Labor, manual or intellectual, is directly or indirectly the producer of all wealth. The capitalist class does no manner of labor; its exertions can not be dignified by that name any more than the exertions of the pickpocket; it is an idle class that lives upon the labor of others, pilfered from them in some instances, violently snatched from them in others. When he who does no labor is found with his pockets gorged, while those who do labor

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are left empty pocketed, he can have got at property only by crime. Like the highwayman who covers the wayfarer with a pistol and says, "Your life or your money," the capitalist class covers the worker with its special pistol, capital, i.e., the things without which production can not be carried on, and says to him "Starve or be fleeced of all that I allow you to produce, less a small quantity that I shall allow you to keep, in order that you may barely live and produce some more needy proletarians for future capitalists to fleece." The property thus wrongfully taken from labor is partly added to capital, and thus becomes from year to year a more powerful pistol with which more effectually to "cover" the worker, more effectually to place him at the mercy of the capitalist class, and more effectually to rob him.

"Profits" are present thefts thus pressed out of the worker's hands; capital, to-day, is accumulated profits, i.e., accumulated stolen goods.

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*A De Leon editorial transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the
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