

EDITORIAL

## MR. HUNTER'S STORY.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**M**R. Robert Hunter is a philanthropist, author and University Settlement worker, a man of wealth, good social standing and conservative. An ideal reformer, he embodies within his personality many of the qualifications that many workingmen fondly believe essential to the attainment of practical success, when exercised in behalf of their class and its interests. Last Sunday, before the Central Federated Union, Mr. Hunter, as Chairman of the Child Labor Committee, told of his efforts to induce State Labor Commissioner John McMackin to enforce the new child labor law.

“I went to Mr. McMackin some years ago,” said Mr. Hunter, “and asked him why there were thousands of children under fourteen years of age employed in this State in violation of the eight-hour law. He said that the law was imperfect and could not be enforced.

“After a year I went to Mr. McMackin and told him there were still thousands of children under age employed in this State and that out of 2,000 cases there had been only five prosecutions. He told me that it was impossible to enforce the law because there were only thirty factory inspectors for the State.

“I went to Governor Odell and saw District Attorney Jerome. Mr. Jerome assigned a member of his staff to prosecute cases in this city. Still there were no convictions and out of thousands of cases only one complaint was made in the courts.”

Mr. Hunter went to say that he found that when inspectors went around in this city the children were turned out of the factories, and next day were taken back again. Up the State children four, five and six years old were employed in factories.

“This,” said he, “was reported to me by a man who was especially sent to make investigations. He advised me to see Mr. McMackin

again, but I said, 'No, I am through with John McMackin.' In one factory there were 300 children under fourteen at work. In one family there were Mary, aged seven; Henry, aged nine, and a little one, aged four, who earned nineteen cents a day. In another factory a little one three years old was employed, and the superintendent of the factory said in a matter of fact way, 'Of course, she can't do very much.'

"I have no ill feeling against Mr. McMackin," said Mr. Hunter, "but I am after him hot foot. He is scared to death if the politicians object to anything he does."

Mr. Hunter's story is told. It illustrates many points. It illustrates the power of the capitalist class to render the law inoperative through their control of the State and their possession of the factories. In the last analysis, McMackin, with his fear of the politicians, is simply the agent of the class behind the politicians—the class that shuts down the factories until the inspector goes by—the capitalist class. The power of the capitalist class is manifested simultaneously on both the political and economic fields.

But, above all, Mr. Hunter's story illustrates the impotency of philanthropy and conservatism, i.e., reform, in curbing the vicious tendencies of capitalism. Mr. Hunter's qualifications avail not against the dual power of the capitalist class. Driven from pillar to post, and defeated by subterfuges in and out of the factory, Mr. Hunter's work is as full of "practical results" at its conclusion as it was at the outset. Capitalism must have cheap labor. Success in competition demands it. Poverty and machinery make its realization easy. The child is sacrificed in order that the proletarian family may be sustained and the capitalist's profits be secured.

Lastly, and as a necessary deduction from the foregoing, Mr. Hunter's story illustrates the fact that nothing but revolution will abolish child labor. The working class must vote itself into control of the powers of government. The working class must take possession of the capital of the country—the factories, etc. With the dual power of politics and economics in our grasp, we can end the infamous spectacle of a monstrously cruel vampire class feeding on the blood of three year old laborers. Then we will not have a class whose members, as a whole, haven't the moral decency to rebel against a system which compels them to commit brutalities to which the working class succumbs. Then we shall have

the Socialist Republic with all its advantages to humanity, irrespective of age or condition.

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

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