

Foredoomed Expectations

By Daniel De Leon

The Carpenter (official organ of the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners), for March, contains a letter from a Stockton, Calif., correspondent that furnishes an opportunity for the restatement of certain fundamental truths bearing upon the labor movement.

This correspondent points out that, at present, California is the object of a great "boom." To use his own words, "within the last few months various 'improvement committees,' 'chambers of commerce,' and 'associations' of one sort or another have been very busy in their efforts to advertise California throughout the Eastern States." And he explains that, "the 'great motif of all this scheming is the sale of land, while those who have no land to sell are anticipating a profit from the 'general results.'" Upon which he hastens to add: "In all this great work of 'booming' the state it is needless to say that the laboring class have no part. To them the entire scheme presents no chance for profit in any way, shape, form or manner; on the contrary, labor can see in this movement nothing more than a threatened danger."

But the Stockton correspondent of *The Carpenter* does not permit the matter to rest here. He proceeds to show how the "boom" allures thousands of workingmen to the "Golden State," with the prospect of obtaining employment and otherwise improving their economic condition. The result is that, having spent their savings in the fruitless endeavor to obtain steady employment and establish themselves as they hoped to, they become a desperate element in the labor market, ready and willing to act as strike breakers, as well as a standing menace to the employed, who may be inclined to seek to

improve wages and conditions. In a word, they overcrowd the labor market, with all its attendant evils. But, says this Stockton correspondent:

“It is a lamentable fact that while the enemies of organized labor are publishing an unlimited amount of stuff to induce the nonunion element to come to California, organized labor in this state is not doing anything to counteract the movement.”

It is right here that the opportunity to restate a few of the fundamental truths bearing on the labor question presents itself. First, let us find out what is this “organized labor” that is expected to counteract the evil effects of “booms” upon the working class?

The term “organized labor” is generally applied to the labor organizations presided over by one Samuel Gompers. Ostensibly the object of “organized labor” is the protection and advancement of working-class interests. Its name presupposes that labor has interests apart from and in conflict with those of capital that call for separate organization and efforts in their behalf. Hence, it is perfectly logical for the uninformed to conclude that, in the matter of deceptions that make for labor’s undoing and oppression, practiced by capital, as in the case of the California “boom,” “organized labor” should ferret out the fraud and oppose it. But, as already indicated, this conclusion is wholly gratuitous and unwarranted by the facts in the case.

“Organized labor” of the Gompers’ variety takes special pains to declare, in season and out, that the interests of capital and labor are not separate and antagonistic but identical and mutual; that, consequently, contrary to the facts cited by the Stockton correspondent, the prosperity of capital, i.e., of the “improvement committees,” “chambers of commerce,” “employers of labor,” etc., is the prosperity of labor.

“Organized labor” strenuously insists that labor is a personality—a flesh and blood embodiment, possessing sense and sentiment—that can, through combination, be taken out of the category of commodities and collectively bargained away to the capitalist class, in a manner and with results befitting labor’s interests, qualities and aspirations.

“Organized labor” strenuously denies what *The Carpenter’s* correspondent’s facts so plainly show, viz., that labor is a commodity bought and sold in the labor market as are other commodities bought and sold in other markets, that is, according to the laws of supply and demand; and that, consequently, the labor market can be overcrowded and the wages of labor depressed by “booms.”

“Organized labor,” holding fast to the false principle of the mutual interests of capital and labor, and denying the unqualified commodity character of labor accordingly, either promotes the schemes of capital that make for labor’s downfall, or else silently acquiesces in their perpetration.

In brief, “organized labor,” being based on wrong principles, is an accomplice of capital in the degradation of the working class. This, the history of the alliance between “organized labor” and the National Civic Federation makes clear; so also does the above-quoted portions of the letter of the Stockton, Calif., correspondent of *The Carpenter*. “Organized labor” fosters the theory of “general results” that the Stockton writer so ably punctures.

“Organized labor” will not be truly organized labor until it repudiates its false principles and doctrines: when it recognizes that the interests of capital and labor are irreconcilably antagonistic and that labor is a commodity, destined to remain such as long as the cap-

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italist system prevails. When “organized labor” reaches that stage—when it is a concrete fact and not a deceptive phrase—then, and not until then, may all workingmen, such as the Stockton, Calif., correspondent of *The Carpenter*, expect it to perform its duties toward the working class, with the assurance that they will not be disappointed in so doing. Hasten the day!

Daily People, March 27, 1905
Socialist Labor Party