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EDITORIAL

NO “POSSIBLY” ABOUT IT.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE New York *Times* declares “the doctrine of a living wage is highly ethical,” and opines that, if an employer’s profits are satisfactory, “he, possibly, would not dispute the theory.” There is no “possibly” about it. The employer will dispute the theory, whatever the state of profits, good, bad, or indifferent.

Individuality is the quality least known in capitalist society. That capitalist society crushes down the individuality of the workingman is an obvious fact. Obvious or not, that is not the question here to be considered. The fact here to be considered is the less obvious, but equally true one that not even the capitalist is equipped with individuality. His social system strips him of the commodity. When the capitalist is seen rushing forward after profits, more profits, still more profits, the sentimental reformer condemns the act as one of “greed,” while the praise-singers of capitalism laud it as one of “individualistic” strength. It is neither. It is an act of compulsion. True enough, the prospect of larger profits has its attraction for the capitalist; but it is not that that really gives impetus to the rush. The real impetus comes from the rear. Behind the smaller capitalist stands his larger fellows, producing more cheaply and thereby threatening the smaller fellow’s existence. In order to hold his own in the competitive struggle, the smaller fellow must needs operate larger capital; in order to operate larger capital he must have it to operate with; in order to have it to operate with his profits must be large enough to do the trick. The whip of the Law of Capital is cracked over the heads of the whole row of capitalists. Each tries and must try to brace up against the more powerful one behind. The long and short of the process is that profits are never “satisfactory,” never can be “satisfactory.”

There is another reason.

Capitalism is a "confidence game." The much boasted-about defeat of Bryanism and of fiat money was not an economic victory for "solid business"; it was merely a political victory of the politicians who were "in" over the politicians who were and have remained "out." Fiat money, what is really implied thereby, never could be defeated by any wing of capitalism. The thing could not be done because both and all the wings of capitalism are hinged upon "fiat." The present panic is the latest proof. Without "confidence" there is no capitalist prosperity. It is a case of dupers duping dupers. Each capitalist plays the "confidence game" on all the others. Another word for "confidence" is "credit." Now then, no credit, no business. Hence, each capitalist has to put on the external appearance of affluence, because—without such appearance, he would enjoy no credit, and without credit he could do no "business." Again, the long and short of this process is that profits are not, and never can be "satisfactory." The requisite falser and ever falser "appearance" to keep the swindle of capitalist "business" agoing renders more, and ever more profits a capitalist necessity.

Fortunately for civilization the capitalist cannot, even if he would, accept the doctrine of a "living wage," or be "satisfied" with his profits. Fortunately the inherent Law of Capitalism compels its minions to disregard their wage slaves. In this fact lies the hope of the future. Sweet words will not take the place of bread and butter. Even the sleekest fakir cannot perform the miracle. The rooster in the story one day answered back to the cook who addressed the chickens in the coop with the question: "Now, my dearly beloved chickens, in what sauce would you like to be boiled?" "We don't want to be boiled at all!"—The day is certain as fate when the Working Class will proclaim aloud: "We don't want any wage at all!" and will enforce the proclamation by abolishing the wage system of slavery and rearing the Socialist Republic.

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