

EDITORIAL

## WHAT “CONSERVATION” REALLY MEANS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**T**HE Republican platform of 1908 announced that the Nation’s “great natural wealth has scarcely been touched”; and it proceeded to emphasize the point saying: “We have a vast domain of three million square miles literally bursting with latent treasure,” yet unscratched. That declaration, was unquestionably correct. Two short years have passed and we hear the howl that the exploitation of natural resources is rapidly exhausting them, and the demand now is to have this national wealth conserved, developed and administered for the good of the people, instead of permitting a few men to amass colossal fortunes by wasting the wealth of the nation. What is the meaning of this contradiction between the facts given in the Republican platform and the conservation cry to-day?

The meaning is two-fold: It signifies that the top capitalists are moving to eliminate even the possibility of competition. Take the coal industry as an illustration. The coal barons now hold coal areas that they figure will give them a supply for certain definite periods, but there are other vast areas of supposed coal lands that stand as a menace to them. It is these other coal lands, not yet pre-empted by the mine lords that are to be conserved, that is, withdrawn, by Federal action.

Of course the scheme must be made “popular,” and, in order to popularize it, there is talk of afterward leasing such withdrawn coal lands in small quantities to “prevent monopoly.” Such anti-monopoly theory is, of course, knocked in the head by the fact that mining to-day must be carried on upon a gigantic scale.

Thus the scheme runs all along the line of conservation, or, as it really should be called, reservation. “Reserve for us, the oil lands, the coal lands, the mineral lands, the forests, the waterways,” in a word, the Nation’s resources, is what the capitalists mean when they talk conservation.

The anxiety of the conservationists to care for the Nation's resources, and the hue and cry they are raising about it, serves also to help fool the workers with the idea that their misery is due to the fact that the country is about worked out.

It remains for the Socialist to point out to the workers that the resources of the country and the capability of the machinery of production are both so great that abundance for all, beyond the dreams of the dreamers of the past, is a possibility today.

That which stands in the way is capitalism; whether it calls itself insurgent, standpatter, conservationist or what not, does not matter. Capitalism exploits the Nation's resources and the people of the Nation, the workers, for its own private ends. Tear it out, workers, root and branch, and conserve both the country and yourselves by inaugurating the Socialist Republic.

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