

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 8, NO. 120.

NEW YORK, MONDAY, OCTOBER 28, 1907.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

NO SWADDLERS WANTED.

By DANIEL DE LEON

WHETHER under the shelter of J.P. Morgan's \$20,000,000 and the Clearing House loan certificate, local business will pull through, or not; whether the present squall in the financial firmament is but a squall or whether it is the precursor of a disastrous storm which will shake capitalism to its roots, one fact stands clear. That is, that the next panic, when it does come, will witness the virtual wiping out of the middle class, and the appropriation of its property and wealth by the big fellows just above—the “captains of industry” whose “captainship” is the piratical captainship of running industry on the rocks that they may the easier scuttle it.

It is at this appropriate time that Mr. Gustav Stickney, editor of *The Craftsman* comes out with a comprehensive plan for saving the country—and incidentally, the doomed middle class. Mr. Stickney's plan is as sweeping as it is simple, and as impossible as both. It is neither more nor less than a return to individual hand production. There will then be no large aggregations of capital, no wicked trusts, no corrupted legislatures; everything will be fraternal and harmonious, and the goose will honk high.

Were a well meaning, but short-sighted philosopher to propose to save man from the knocks and bumps incidental to his progress about this globe, by returning him to his swaddling clothes, the error of the scheme would be self-apparent. Swaddling clothes are good for the infant. They protect him while he is yet too delicate and weak to fend for himself. They guard his limbs while he is not yet strong enough to walk. But once the bones have hardened, and the art of walking has been learned, it is murderous to the man to replace him in his swaddling clothes. And what is more, as long as he is kept in swaddling clothes, HE CAN NEVER LEARN TO WALK.

So it is with handicraft production. Handicraft was at one time good for the race. It provided roughly against cold, hunger, and the elements. It satisfied the barer material needs of mankind. In so far, and for its time, it was good. But no higher development of the race was possible till improved and concentrated production relieved mankind, or a part of it, from the necessity of continually fending off the bread and butter problem. When that occurred, and in the measure that it occurred, the race was enabled to lift its endeavors to higher things—to education, to ethics, to art. The less effort with which the material necessities of life can be produced, the greater the opportunity for culture and advancement.

Modern trustified, centralized industry has reached the point where, by the wider application of the highest type of machine known and by the elimination of all unproductive effort, the requisites for human life and comfort can be produced with the expenditure of four hours' daily toil on the part of the individual. In that fact lie unlimited opportunities for the development of a race in the face of whose grandeur the boasted civilization of Greece and Rome will seem puny. What Mr. Stickney's plan would amount to would be to throw away these golden opportunities. Not only that, but even present-day civilization would have to go with them. Universal handicraft would not permit of even that modicum of education and culture possible to-day. It would be murderous to the race to throw it back into such a slough of compulsory ignorance and need. And what is more, so long as handicraft was adhered to, NO PROGRESS WOULD BE POSSIBLE.

The trust, or modern production, can not, must not be smashed. It has been the mission of capitalism to develop it, as the perfect tool of production. It will be the mission of Socialism to turn its benefits, too long seized by the few, into the lives of all.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded October 2009

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