

EDITORIAL

DEAD WOOD AND SQUEEZED LEMONS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE circumstance, that the Customs employes whom Loeb, Taft's new Collector of the Port of New York, is just now dismissing, are those who connived with the sugar trust in its gigantic frauds upon the government, is an unfortunate one. It is unfortunate in that it will serve to veil the significance of other, and threatened, discharges soon to take place in the same department.

Under date of the 6th inst., Washington despatches reported Loeb to be in consultation over the fate of the "dead wood" in the New York Custom House. The axe was to fly, and the "dead wood" was to be eliminated.

"Dead wood" in the mouth of an employer, private or governmental, it makes no difference, means the less speedy, the less intense, the less self-driving of the force. The constant demand being for ever more speed, ever more "results," regardless of the inhuman strain thereby inflicted upon the employe, these less speedy, etc., are periodically eliminated. The "dead wood" is hewed away, and "new wood" takes its place.

But this "new wood" is only considered "new" by virtue of its being able to do more work in the same time than the "dead wood." Hence it must introduce and maintain an increased pace. But this increased pace means increased consumption of vital force, hence earlier breakdown. With ever-heightening rapidity the "new wood" inevitably becomes "dead wood," and in its turn is replaced by "newer wood."

That is the process as it can be traced in every branch of industry. All the handicraft trades suffer from it. The railway mail clerks and the employes of large railway offices are conspicuous examples of it. Even the teachers do not escape it—witness the Orange, N.J., school superintendent who makes it his boast that he can get all the good there is in a teacher out of her in five years. Now Loeb is to take his turn at it in the New York Custom House.

“Dead wood” is the term commonly used to refer to the victims of this forcing system. Considering the facts, “squeezed lemons” would be far more appropriate.

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

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