

EDITORIAL

THE “GENERAL STRIKE.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

AMONG the words a-forming, the term “general strike” easily takes front place in the front ranks of the words and terms, the angles and sharp corners of which the ebb and flow of events in our generation are wearing off and rapidly shaping into a new mold.

Taken strictly, the term “general strike,” as a revolutionary move, is an absurdity.

The “strike” is a move of defence. The “strike” is a weapon that excludes the very thought of aggression, let alone of revolutionary onslaught. The workingman on strike quits the factory, shop, mill, or yard. These various plants of production, without the aid of which the making of a living is impossible to-day, are, by the strike, left in the possession of the very class which use them in oppressing the workers. The “striker,” by his very attitude, concedes proprietary rights to the Capitalist Class. The concession is fatal to the revolutionary thought.

The Social Revolution denies proprietary rights to the Capitalist Class. The Social Revolution maintains that these rights, now exercised, arose in denial of certain previous rights, which, in turn, had arisen in denial of rights, exercised before them—and so on. In short, the Social Revolution maintains that every Revolution brings, in its own folds, its own code of legality, or system of rights, which supplants the previous one. The code of legality, or system of rights, that the pending Social Revolution carries in its folds establishes proprietary rights over the tools of production in the people only, industrially organized, and co-operatively laboring in useful production and services. Obviously, a posture that implies proprietary rights in the Capitalist Class over the plants of production, and which emphasizes the implication by leaving the class that is to be dethroned, in possession of its throne,—obviously, such a posture is everything but revolutionary. Such a posture indicates conciliation—the attempt at conciliation—the idea that

conciliation is possible. No revolutionary move harbors such postures, attempts, or ideas.

Gradually, however, the use of the term "general strike" is fashioning the word "strike" into a new meaning. Like the word "umbrella," which originally meant shade-maker, and has gradually changed its original meaning until it is now generally understood to be a screener-against-rain; like the word "tribe," which originally meant a third portion of a population, has gradually changed its original sense, and now is understood to mean a section of a population without regard to numerical rank; like so many other words which use has caused their original sense to be lost sight of, and are at present understood in a new sense, a sense contradictory to their etymological origin;—like all such words, the "strike," coupled to the word "general," is steadily but surely acquiring a meaning that is exactly the opposite of the original article. The new meaning towards which the word is drifting is "The lock-out of the Capitalist Class."

As a rose under whatever name smells just as sweet, none but idle minds will quarrel with the name of the move that will make the quietus of Capitalism. Whether the revolutionary act be termed "general strike," or the "lock-out of the Capitalist Class," it will be as well, as effective, as noble. Nevertheless, there is danger in this period of transition, before the old significance is lost and the new is firmly attached to the word "strike."

The word "strike," in the term "general strike," promotes the error of existing, craft Union organization. The word "strike," in the term "general strike," presupposes the industrial, or integral form of productive and service-labor organization. Not unless the practical construction of the Army of Labor keeps pace with the aspirations embodied in the transition of the word "strike" from its original meaning into its new meaning of "general lock-out of the Capitalist Class"—not unless the practical construction of the Army of Labor does that, can the "general strike" triumph. Until then the "general strike" will be a top-heavy affair—all Wish and no Power; all Wind and no Substance;—fruitful of disaster only.

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