

# DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 10, NO. 152.

NEW YORK, MONDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 1909.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

## BUSINESS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

“**T**O write a poem  
On the Oil of Bob  
Is something of a job,”

wrote one of Poe’s characters. One who would write upon modern business finds himself in somewhat of the same fix. Where shall he begin? Shall he begin with the just-bared olive-oil frauds, wherein olive oil was mixed with sediment to discolor it, declared “unfit for human use” to escape the 40 per cent. duty, and then cleared, mixed ten parts of itself with ninety parts cottonseed oil, and sold as the finest grade table produce? Or shall he begin with the Sugar frauds wherein the government was swindled of millions by a little steel wire in the scale-stanchion, under the patronage, it is declared, of high officials in the treasury? Shall he take up first the Standard Oil {trust}, which has just been adjudged a criminal combination in restraint of trade, and is now laughing at the order to dissolve, seeing it can nominally disband and yet control trade just as well by “gentlemen’s agreements”? Or shall he turn his attention upon the Tobacco trust, which had the same sentence of criminality and mandate to disperse served upon it two years ago, and still is serenely bobbing along in the same old criminal way? Whichever direction one turns, business presents itself to view as a mass honeycombed with dishonesty and corruption, even when judged by its own law, which takes no account at all of its biggest crime, its robbery of the working class.

It is useless to speak of the “good,” the “honest” part of a cancer. There is only one thing to do with a cancer, and that is cut it out. There is just one thing to do with business, and that is cut it out. For it is no more necessary to the industrial life of the nation than a flourishing sarcoma is to a man; and just as dangerous.

The business man, whether in the manufacturing or commercial line, is not an

aider in, but a parasite upon, production. As well say Captain Kidd assisted in industry, as say the modern business man does. His own interests, not society's, are what he is there to cultivate. If his interests run parallel with society's, society may thank its stars. If his interests run counter to society's, society suffers for it. If society wants something, and no capitalist finds its production profitable, society goes without. If some capitalists thinks there is a profit to be made in something, and society does not want it, he sends out his agents, drummers, consuls or missionaries to create the demand; and when the demand is created, and society demands an increase in wages in order to buy, he berates it for its "extravagance," and for "wanting to live better than Queen Elizabeth." His goods may be absolutely useless to society, as shoddy clothing and paper-soled shoes, or even positively harmful, as dime novels and tobacco; yet if he can squeeze a profit out of them he will keep on turning them out.

Doubtless some men of business do seem to be performing useful service for society in their business activities. These are only the second raters. The big fellows, the business men par excellence, never do. And even with the second raters, it is seeming only. They appear to aid in production or distribution. But it is only socially necessary labor that is of value to society. For the same reason that a man who would weave cloth to-day on a hand loom is not usefully producing but merely wasting time, so the total mass of modern competitive, cut-throat, cheating, government-debauching business is not of use, but of absolute detriment. It means mouths eating out of the total store who have put nothing in.

But what can be expected of business, when it is founded on the robbery of the worker of four-fifths of his product? Nothing, except that it ripen itself to the point of undeniable maturity for excision, and thus clear the way for the co-operative republic.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.  
Uploaded January 2011

[slpns@slp.org](mailto:slpns@slp.org)