

EDITORIAL

## PROGRESSIVE LABOR LEGISLATION.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**A**T the two days' conference of the American Association for Labor Legislation just closed in Chicago Prof. Henry C.R. Seager bragged that 1911 "has given us workmen's compensation or accident insurance laws in ten different States."

John Calder, manager of the Remington typewriter works, declared "We must have uniform safety laws, and the obligation to safe-guard dangerous machinery must be placed upon the employer."

Prof. John R. Commons, whose theory is "to bring about the harmonious relation of employers and employes in working out their industrial problems," devoted one whole address to cracking up the new Wisconsin Industrial Commission law which "is unique and is attracting much attention."

Dr. John B. Andrews said: "For the first time in America six States (California, Connecticut, Illinois, Michigan, New York and Wisconsin) have this year passed laws requiring physicians to report cases of occupational diseases."

Don H. Lescohier described the work of securing reports of accidents in Minnesota, "where the best law in the country is in operation."

And so on, ad infinitum, the proposers and heralds of "progressive labor legislation" tooted their horns and the horn of their theory that social revolution can be staved off by tempering the wind of capitalism to the shorn lamb, the proletariat. So it might be, provided the employing class were the all-powerful thing it would love to be. But behind every capitalist is a greater power, resistlessly driving him on—the power of economic development. In his competition with his fellows, every employer must grasp at every chance to cheapen his production. If a labor law, "progressive" or otherwise, stands in the way, so much the worse for the law.

Witness the New York State law on the employment of children, a "progressive"

enough bit of legislation, on the face of it. Yet says the *Tenth Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labor*, New York, 1910 (pp. 31–32):

“Last year the percentage of illegal child labor in this group for the three cities [Buffalo, Rochester, New York] was 51.4. This year it is 49.1. . . . IN QUEENS AND RICHMOND EVERY CHILD FOUND AT WORK WAS EMPLOYED IN VIOLATION OF LAW.”

Statutes enacted by agents of capitalism and left in the hands of appointees of capitalism, can not be enforced against capitalism in any such way as to be of material benefit to labor. “Progressive labor legislation” is a milk sop on a broken limb.

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