

EDITORIAL

THE MINING PUZZLE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

“**T**HE collection of Union dues by the operators” is one of the leading demands made by the United Mine Workers’ Union upon the anthracite mine owners, and rejected by these.

Here are two puzzles; nay, three:—

How can a Union, which has recently been giving signs of progress adhere to so hoary-headedly vicious a method as the old “check off”?

The “check-off” turns the employer into a Union officer. Seeing he checks off from the pay envelope the dues, assessments and other money obligations of the men to the Union, and turns the same over into the Union treasury, the employer is turned into a sort of Financial Secretary of the Union, a self elected one, at that.

The “check-off” is the trick by which the Labor Fakir of old recruited his victims. Of their own free will the workers would not place their heads into the Fakirs’ yoke, called A.F. of L. “Union.” In order to compel them to do so, the Fakir schemed with the employer the “check-off” scheme whereby, whether the worker chose or not, he became a member of the Union, his dues being checked off by the employer. The “check-off,” accordingly, was a confession of the Union’s unfitness to attract members by the force of its own virtues; it was a confession that the Union had to resort to the crack of the capitalist’s whip so as to make the rank and file swallow the Fakir’s iniquities; it was a confession of the fraternal relations between Fakir and Capitalist.

Finally, the “check-off” is a declaration, made as clearly as could be, that the “check-off” Union cares not for the men; all it cares for is their dues. In other words, the “check-off” Union did not fulfill, or attempt to fulfill its historic mission of drilling the working class for their emancipation. It only plucked them.

It certainly is a puzzle to see the Union, which only recently insisted upon John

Mitchell's severing his connection either with the Union or with the National Civic Federation, inscribe the "check-off" as one of the principles on its banner.

For obverse reasons, the supplemental question comes, How can the anthracite mine owners be so blind to their own interests as to seek to strike the "check-off" off the Union's banner? Do not the mine owners realize that, if they decline to check off the miners' dues, these may organize some other Union, some Union that repudiates, not with words only, but with deed also the "reciprocity" of interests between the Working Class and the Capitalist Class, and pour their dues freely into the coffers of such a new Union for the propagating of their principles? Have the mine owners forgotten that, by means of the "check-off," they furnish their Labor-lieutenants, the Fakirs, the plausible pretext that theirs is the UNION, and thus place into the hands of the Fakir the whip with which to bulldoze opposition, or "rival Unions," by yelling "Scab!"?

Surely, this is a puzzle. It is a puzzle when looked at from the angle of the operatives. It is a puzzle when looked at from the angle of the operators. A bird's-eye view of the two puzzles merges them into one, and raises a third by its compendiousness.

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