

EDITORIAL

## BETWEEN THE RIVER AND THE MILL.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**O**VER the signature of “Director” the New York *Sun* of the 16th of the current month publishes the plea of a Little Falls employer for justice to the Little Falls mills against whom a strike has been on, and which the Commissioners of Mediation and Arbitration have been gathering testimony on.

The *Sun*’s correspondent takes up the case of “Mary Konovsky,” whose deposition was to the effect that she was 22 years of age; could speak no English and could neither read nor write; received \$6 a week as a spinner; lived, together with two other girls in a room for which they paid \$3 a week; and she now demands \$6.90.

“Director” supplements the deposition with the statement that “Mary Konovsky” has no industrial training of any kind; that he would rather pay Mary three times her wages if she were defter at her fingers; and, turning to other employers, “Director” asks which of them will out-bid him, and pay her the \$6.90 that she sets up as her price. Of course none will; she is “not worth it.” And “Director” sums up the situation in these words: “It really looks as if it were up to Mary to choose between the river and the mill.”

“Director’s” inference is obvious—his mill is a charitable institution for the prevention of suicide by working girls; hence, instead of being denounced, he should be praised.

“Director” has graphically stated the facts—but his conclusion is a somersault back.

The number of proletarians who can be turned to use and yet have “no industrial training of any kind” is on the increase. It is a feature of improved machinery to eliminate skill and yet leave the “unskilled” profitable. It goes without saying that “Director” would not pay Mary \$6 if she did not sweat wealth of a value in excess of the \$6. The price he pays is not below that which any other employer would.

Seeing that employerdom holds the gate, through which Mary can at all gain access to bread, the conclusion is, not the somersault back that “Director” turns, not that “Director” is a charitable institution for the prevention of suicide, not that his mill stands between Mary and the river, but that the river is a whip that lashes Mary into the mill, and thus enables “Director” to profit by the dog-in-the-manger position which he occupies.

The position of “Director” is the position of the Capitalist Class. Improved machinery, itself the work of the proletariat, eliminates skill along with the need for arduous toil. The private ownership of the machine turns all the blessings that the machine is big with into the pockets of the capitalist class, and leaves the proletariat substantially where it was before, that is, out in the cold—with the choice of the mill where to be ground down and killed by inches, or the river where to end existence at one plunge.

Socialism opens another choice—the choice of overthrowing the capitalist system, raising the Socialist or Industrial Republic, where the benefit of improved machinery and methods is made accessible to all who will work—with the river as the alternative for those, who, filled with the capitalist soul, desire to live without work.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.  
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[slpns@slp.org](mailto:slpns@slp.org)