

EDITORIAL

“INVEST IN SPANISH AMERICA.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

{III.}

THE third of the attractions that the advertisement of the International Trading and Developing Company in *Below the Rio Grande* promises to American capital in Spanish America is “Low Wages.”

“Low Wages,” “High Wages”—lo, terms that mean little of themselves.

What the capitalist, or entrepreneur, is after is large profits. A wage of \$1 a day is low when compared with a wage of \$2 a day; but if the \$1 a day man yields to the capitalist 5 per cent. profits, while the \$2 a day man yields to him 50 per cent., then a \$1 a day wage is higher, in the sense of being more expensive, and the \$2 a day wage is lower, in the sense of being less expensive to the employer.

Wages in Spanish America are arithmetically low. In point of fact, the lower-paid Spanish American labor is more expensive than the higher-paid labor of the United States.

The wantslessness that Lassalle fifty years ago pointed his finger at as the bane of the German proletariat, generally,—Lassalle called it the “Verdamnte Beduerfwisslosigkeit,” the damnable wantslessness of the German workingman—is, in still primitive Spanish America, a bane, not to the proletariat, but to capital.

Located in a climate that is paradisaical, the aborigines, a term that there means the working class, are in the full enjoyment of the ideal condition in which the philosopher of old gloried to find himself when shipwrecked and naked—they carry all their havings about them, and need none other. Their raiment is virtually Adamic; Adamic is their shelter; as to their food, not Adam in all the glory of Eden was provided like any of them.

The chapters of Marx’s *Capital*, upon what such conditions mean to the capitalist, are intensely luminous: The bountifulness of Nature, rendered all the more

bountiful by the slightness of the aboriginal’s wants, enables him to live a careless, improvident life, and thereby disables the capitalist from holding him down in wage-slavery.

There are only two ways for overcoming the difficulty—each of the two more expensive than the other. One way is to pen the free aboriginal in Putumayo slave pens; the other is to import “seasoned proletarians.” The former method is immediately expensive in itself, besides bristling with dangers that threaten still greater expensiveness; the latter method, though less expensive at the start, is a slow Sisyphus process, the expensiveness of which increases in the course of its application. The Putumayo disclosures illustrate the horn of the dilemma: the vastness of the outlay to promote the migration of “seasoned proletarians” to do the labor on the Panama Canal illustrates the other horn of the dilemma on which Capital is impaled in Spanish America.

Again we repeat, in the closing words of the two previous articles of this series—Trading and Developing Companies may, or may not, be posted on these facts. The College training, that their leading geniuses may have received, may render them easy dupes; or they may have shed their College training, and, having made their “experience” at the cost of their own bank accounts, transfer the field of their operations to this country, where, setting up an office for “developing” Spanish America, they turn their activities towards inverting the process—improve their own bank accounts, and thereby allowing others to make their “experience.”

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