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EDITORIAL

BOY-LABOR.

By DANIEL DE LEON

WILCOX (of counsel for the Coal Companies)—“You would not advocate dispensing with boy-labor altogether?”

MITCHELL—“No, Sir.”

—Scranton Examination, Nov. 15, 1902.

THE science of legislation lies in the bringing up of the youth. As the children of a race are brought up, so will the adult of that race be. It is elemental that three things go into such bringing up:

The physical;

The mental;

The moral.

As to the physical, it depends upon food and exercise, and upon physical surroundings.

The mental is rooted upon the physical. With the proper physical basis, the mental part of the child depends upon leisure for intellectual development, leisure for the enjoyments of the play-day period that so materially affects the after-man; and lastly the proper mental surroundings.

The crowning part of man, the moral, rests upon the previous two, and is wholly the compound flower of them.

Can any of these three elements go into the make-up of the boy that is thrust into work at the mines? Not one! The work there is one that saps the physique. The time there consumed is time robbed from the requisite leisure for study and play. With impaired physique and a mind prematurely turned to the support of life, the moral part of such a boy is cracked.

Such is “boy-labor.” Aye, it is worse. It implies such poverty at home as deprives the



JOHN MITCHELL (1870-1919)

boy of the surrounding elements requisite for the development of the man. In short, “boy-labor” implies Capitalism, as Capitalism implies an ever cheaper human commodity for labor-power.

Unquestionable facts these. Even the closet man knows them. Shall not a Mitchell have seen the distressing proofs of them? Of course he has. And yet what says he? “No, Sir,” promptly in answer to the capitalist’s question, that implies the absolute propriety in the crime: “You would not advocate dispensing with boy-labor altogether?”—“No, Sir.”

The language of Mitchell betrays the man’s views. The man’s views betray the camp in which he stands. Seeing, moreover, that he posed and is helped to pose as a “Champion of the Working Class,” his language, his views and the camp he stands in all crowd to the bar of conscience and of sense, and pronounce him guilty.

The Mitchells must go! A Working Class, bleeding from boyhood up, demands it—aye, demands it all the louder because in its misery it has been accustomed to look up to such miscreants as its friends.

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