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EDITORIAL

THINKING IN BILLIONS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

RICHARD H. Edmonds, editor of the *Manufacturers' Record*, is in favor of establishing a new way of regarding "our" great material development and the "prosperity" attending it, during the last quarter of a century. He declares that "until we learn to think in billions" we cannot measure its meaning. Mr. Edmonds goes further; not content with declarations, he proceeds to develop means to the end. He piles up columns of figures according to decades, and, by way of emphasis, illustrates them with blocks of increasing lengths.

Despite his efforts, however, Socialists are not inclined to sympathize with Mr. Edmonds' new method of thinking. It is an old device revamped. The capitalists designate as national the wealth that belongs to themselves. They make themselves and society one in order to hide the poverty of the majority in an immense aggregation of wealth that really belongs to a few. So with "our prosperity" and the billions in which "we" are to think; the first does not exist, the second belong to a declining percentage of persons. This fact is revealed, for example, in the figures relating to farm values and people engaged in agriculture given by Mr. Edmonds, when analyzed with the aid of United States Census figures. This set of figures are among the most important given by Mr. Edmonds.

According to them, from 1870 to 1905, the value of all farm property in the United States increased from \$8,900,000,000 to \$26,570,000,000. That is, the value almost trebled. In the same period, the number of persons engaged in agriculture jumped from 5,992,000 to 11,500,000. That is, they almost doubled in number. On the face of it, this would indicate an increase of wealth for the whole farming population amounting to 50 per cent. When scanned in the light of the census statistics, however, it means an increased concentration of wealth, with all that that implies. The census gives the following figures on farms, farm owners, cash and

share tenants, and the percentages of the last three for the decade 1880 to 1890 inclusive:—

1880—Number of farms, 4,008,907; owners, 2,984,306; cash tenants, 322,357; share tenants, 702,244. Per cent., owners, 74.5; cash tenants, 8.0; share tenants, 17.5.

1890—Number of farms, 4,564,641; owners, 3,269,728; cash tenants, 454,659; share tenants, 840,254. Per cent., owners, 71.6; cash tenants, 10.0; share tenants, 18.4.

1900—Number of farms, 5,737,408; owners, 3,712,408; cash tenants, 751,655; share tenants, 1,273,299. Per cent., owners, 64.7; cash tenants, 13.1; share tenants, 22.2.

A steady decline in the percentage of farm owners, the difference between the decades 1880 and 1900 amounting to 10 per cent.—that is what the figures reveal. At the same time there is a proportionate increase in the percentage of cash and share tenants. This decreased percentage in farm owners and increase in tenants of both classes despite the trebling of farm values, takes no account of farm laborers. Were these specified the result would be more damaging to Mr. Edmonds' "new" idea and its "illuminating" blocks. In 1900, according to the census, farm owners and cash and share tenants combined numbered 5,736,368; while Mr. Edmonds' figures give the number of people engaged in agriculture in the same year, as 10,438,000, or almost double the combined number of farm owners and tenants of the two classes named.

All these facts, taken together, point to a concentration of wealth in agriculture, accompanied, as is the concentration of wealth in general, by increasing dependence, exploitation and wage slavery. They completely knock out the prosperous conditions for all agriculturalists that are implied in Mr. Edmonds' "thoughts in billions"; and explain the existence of radical bourgeois movements among the farmers.

The analysis of farm statistics here made is applicable to any other set of Mr. Edmonds' figures. The set relating to the railroads, for instance, show capitalization, freight tons and prospective expenditures, running up into the billions each; nevertheless, thousands of employes are compelled to resort to strikes,

or the threat of strikes, to secure a small wage increase. Such is their condition,—those men can only afford to think in nickels instead of Mr. Edmonds' billions.

Mr. Edmonds will have to devise a scheme of hypnosis that is actually and substantially new. His figures will not stave off the growing conviction that capitalist prosperity is being referred to in terms too general to accord with specific facts. The people of this country are learning that only the ultra-capitalists of this country can appropriately think in billions, since they alone possess them. They are further learning that these ultra-capitalists owe their possessions to the private ownership of natural and social resources—land and capital—which are used to exploit the great working class and render society tributary to capitalist interests. As a consequence they are agitating in ever-growing numbers for the social ownership of these essentials to well-being. Mr. Edmonds' spurious psychology, when once exposed, will merely tend to hasten their success. Speed the day!

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

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slpns@slp.org