

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 7, NO. 236.

NEW YORK, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 1907.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

“THE OLD SPHYNX QUESTION.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE New York *Evening Post*, the organ of the Wall Street gamblers, shrewdly surmises that the lectures of the “distinguished English writer on social economic subjects,” Mallock, are not likely to hold back the in-rush of the flood of Socialism, any more than lectures could hold back the in-rolling tide. Gathering comfort out of its own simile, the *Post* is of the opinion that, as the in-rolling tide rolls back and out again, so will the flood of Socialism. The *Post*, one time a valiant preacher against Socialism, has evidently discovered that the waves are deaf to its “wisdom”; that it is not quite sure about the quality of the Socialist “wave” to recede as unbidden as it pours in is equally evident from the *Post*’s effort to back up its simile with something more than a figure of speech. That on which the *Post* pins its faith is what it calls “the old Sphynx-Question”—“Who will pay the bills of Socialism?”

It is the fate of these capitalists, whom terror has deprived of reason, to drop one broken reed only to pick out another, still more broken, to lean upon.

Who will pay the bills of Socialism?—Why, the identical class that now pays the bills of capitalism—the workers.

The claim of capitalists that their “management” is a wealth producer, and the main factor, at that, in wealth production, is a myth. What Capitalism “manages” to do to-day is not promote but check production—nearly 3,000,000 tons of Maine ice left to rot in the interest of the Ice Trust; patents untold kept under lock and key, as recently revealed in the suit of the Eastern Paper Bag Company, in the interest of high prices; vast areas of the Nation’s territory, vast enough to support the bulk of our present population, left to lie fallow in the **interest** of monopoly; a volume of unemployed equivalent to not less than 5,000,000 potential wealth-producers kept in enforced idleness in the interest of capitalist economic rule;—these and

thousands of other instances tell the tale that the tale of capitalist “management’s” being a factor in production is a “tale for the marines.”

The claim that the capitalist “directs” and thereby makes production possible is a nursery tale. The capitalists “direct” conspiracies only against one another. The celebrated decision of Judge Van Brunt some fifteen years ago, acquitting the directors of the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad of crime on the occasion of a disastrous wreck in the tunnel, was to the point. The directors were set free on the ground that there can be no crime without intent, no intent without knowledge. The directors had no knowledge of how the trains were being run. Hence they were guiltless; the only guilty ones were the workingmen. They had knowledge because they ran and operated the trains from top to bottom, from end to end.

The claim that the capitalist “works” is a “fish story.” Work is only that human effort that produces wealth where none was. The effort of the pickpocket, intense, mental, manual and artistic though it is, is not “work.” It PRODUCES nothing. It only TRANSFERS wealth, already in existence in one pocket, into some one else’s pocket. The *Post’s* Wall Street gambling clientele ever talks of how much money they “make.” They “make” not one copper. What they do is to transfer wealth from other people’s pockets into their own. The fish story about how much the capitalist works will never cause the in-rushing flood of Socialism to recede.

It is Labor that to-day “pays the bills.” Idleness can produce nothing, hence can pay nothing. The Labor that to-day “pays the bills” of capitalism, having, under Socialism, blotted out the bills, together with the thing itself, will have its funds, multiplied a thousand fold, at its own disposal wherewith to pay its own bills. It will then no longer be a case of paying the bills for feasts that others enjoy, but for feasts that Labor itself will revel in.

The answer to the “old Sphynx-Question” is as old as the silly old question itself.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded August 2009

slpns@slp.org