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FIRST EDITORIAL

THE DELUSION OF PROPERTY.

By DANIEL DE LEON

The era we live in requires a special definition for “property.” Time was when any material thing was “property.” That time is no more. Before material things can be dignified with the term of “property,” their quantity must now be ascertained.

Property affords freedom. If it does not, that thing is not property. A thousand dollars would seem to be “property”; yet to-day, he who has that amount only has not “property,” he holds the delusion of property. What he holds is not large enough to afford him freedom, inasmuch as it is not enough to enable him to compete successfully with the holder of a hundred times as much. Holding a thing that looks like property, but is none in that essential of bestowing freedom on its holder, such a holder imagines he does hold property, and, accordingly, becomes an upholder of the capitalist system which is beating him down.

The deluding effect of little holdings, their effect of causing their holders to believe themselves the peers of all other property-holders, and thereby enlisting them into pillars of capitalism,—that has not passed unperceived by the large holders or capitalists. It has become a positive act of strategy among capitalists to spread property in such a manner that, while it never can be found in sufficient quantity in any one hand to become dangerous, it {can} be found in a sufficient number of hands to insure their effective support to the capitalist tyrant. The latest instance of this strategic move is furnished just now in the West.

The directors of the Great Northern voted to increase the capital stock of the company to the amount of \$7,500,000, and sell portions of the stock to employees of the road (under certain conditions), and the balance, the bulk, to present holders of stock.

The move is timely. The Socialist, class-conscious agitation that is being carried on among the workers, is giving these eyes to see. They are finding out that

they are an exploited class, having no common interests with their employers. From that they are taking a step further, moving towards the overthrow of the capitalist system. What is better calculated to again blur their vision than to render them subject to the delusion of property? Once holding stock, it is expected that these railroad men will not stop to consider that their stock is too trifling to give them a say in the administration of the company; they are expected to see simply the “property” that they hold, the profits or dividends that, in thin, consumptive rivulets, comes to them; and they will then not only work all the harder, submit to all the more vexations, but become all the more zealous upholders of capitalism, all the more furious foes of Socialism.—This is the expectation.

Will it so happen? That remains to be seen. Certain it is that no better test there is of the effectiveness of the Socialist teachings, spread among the workers, than just this new move, this attempt to deceive the toilers with the notion of their being property-holders, by putting little property into their hands. To the extent that the move succeeds, to that extent Socialist teaching was defective, and will have to be intensified.

Let us labor, watch and wait!

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