

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 1, NO. 208.

NEW YORK, THURSDAY, JANUARY 24, 1901.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

A COMMON ERROR.

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The statement is cropping up with great frequency in the reports from Labor meetings that a “demand for higher wages,” backed, if necessary, by a strike is “warranted” in this or that specific shop because of the “prosperous conditions” there. This reasoning is false, and it is mischievous.

The reasoning is false because it proceeds from the theory that, if “conditions are prosperous” in a shop, it necessarily means that the employer is pocketing larger revenues, and, consequently, there is a larger margin to share up between employer and employees. “Prosperous conditions” are by no means indications of larger pocketings by the employer; they may be accompanied by smaller pocketings than under less “prosperous conditions.” The politico-pharisaic dictum “no one can grow rich by legislation” has had all the stuffing knocked out of it.

In the development of society a point has been reached where it is frequently hard to determine the exact point at which the Legislative hall ends and the factory, mill or yard begins. The politician and the employer have been drawing together. They are depending ever more upon each other. Thus the employer is acquiring ever more “partners,” with whom he has to share his profits, and without whom he would be driven out of business altogether. Under these circumstances, increased “prosperous conditions” may, and frequently do, go accompanied with decreased final pocketings by the employer, who naturally prefers to have something rather than nothing. Such establishments grow in concentrated industrial power of Capital; by his political connections the employer gains might; nevertheless, the margin from which the sharing with Labor is concerned has declined. If the absence of “prosperous conditions” is sufficient “warrant” to abstain from a “demand for higher wages,” the presence of such conditions does not necessarily offer better prospects.

But besides being false, as partly grounded on ignorance of the trend of things, the reasoning is mischievous, as partly grounded on the false assumption that

Labor and Capital are “partners,” or “brothers.” The principle that presides over the “division” between employer and employee is not one of economic equality, implied in the word “partner,” nor is it the principle of affection implied in the word “brother.” The presiding principle excludes wholly both the idea of equality and of affection: it is the principle of ruthless Usurpation, of cruel One-sidedness. The capitalist is a usurper of power; with the club of capital, which he has pilfered and highway-robbed the workingman of, he makes the “division,” that is to say, despoils his employees. Absurd is then the notion that the chances of the despoiled for a larger share depend upon the “prosperous conditions” of the despoiler! Just the reverse, if anything.

The “warrant” for a demand for higher wages lies in the relation between employer and employee, the spoiler and the spoiled. The demand, in order to be successful, must be permanent; it must be like a flag of defiance nailed to the fore, and guiding the way to a continuous struggle, in which the strike at the outer ditches of shop is supplemented by the battle at the hustings, until the capitalist fort of Public Powers is stormed by Labor, and the despoiling capitalist class is thrown over the walls.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded December 2005