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EDITORIAL

“PROSPERITY.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE *Sun* recently gave vent to a rhapsody on “prosperity.” The result was an unexpected one—a letter from a reader who said, “it reminds the thinking man of the rhetorical flourish of the spellbinder just before election.” The reader (in *The Sun* of July 20) proceeds to cite his own case, thusly:

“I am an American, of well known family. I am well educated; I have had fifteen or twenty years experience as a newspaper man, reporter and editor. I am also an adept at writing advertisements. I am a first class stenographer and typewriter, and have filled the post of private secretary with the utmost satisfaction to my employer. I have even essayed a little fiction now and then, with more or less success. I am industrious, sober and bear excellent references as to character and ability. I am one of those who, eight years ago, donned the blue of Uncle Sam and offered my services to my country when she called for volunteers against a foreign foe.

“For the last several months I have been utterly unable to secure employment of any sort, and have suffered privations and hardships almost unbearable and unbelievable. In my search for employment I have visited Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Pittsburg, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Chicago, Toledo, Cleveland, Columbus, Buffalo, Rochester and many smaller cities. I have written answers to scores of advertisements and have not received one reply. I have haunted the editorial rooms of newspaper offices; my efforts at employment have extended from Boston and New York to San Francisco, Portland and Spokane, even including Las Vegas. I have paid at least one so-called ‘newspaper men’s exchange’ to find work for me—and all in vain.”

This is certainly a striking “prosperity” counterblast. It suggests a picture of what would happen were the army of workingmen and workingwomen of the country gifted with equal powers of expression. Then the grievances of this one man would be multiplied in print many millionfold. Even in so-called prosperous times, the unemployed range in some States from twenty to forty per cent of the working population.

On the other hand, consider the overworked! These are slaughtered by the thousands annually, 17,700 being the record of the killed and injured for 1905 in the Pittsburg district alone. Men generally gauge prosperity by the enhanced security it gives to life; not by an increase in mortality statistics. Thus it is safe to say that, the fatal intensification of labor, arising from the competitive need of a low cost of production, stimulated by the great demand of “good times,” is as great proof of the lack of prosperity as is unemployment resulting from the chronic displacement of labor by machinery. The extremes of a capitalist hell—no work and overwork—do not constitute well-being, either according to the accepted standards of judgment, or those promulgated by the working class revolution.

Is there no prosperity at all then? Surely there is, plenty of it—for the members of the capitalist class. These, owning the means of production, distribution, transportation and exchange, are enabled to expropriate the fruits of the nation’s toil, and roll in every luxury that wealth can procure. Overindulgence, not overwork, jeopardizes their life. Even then the average of life among them is almost a score of years more than that among the working class whom they exploit.

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