

EDITORIAL

THE ANTI-IMMIGRATION HOWL.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE Anti-Immigration howl, which raises its head periodically upon every possible pretext, is now raising its head upon the pretext of Dr. Charles W. Eliot's recent declarations for liberal laws to govern the entrance of foreign-born workingmen.

The howl is a false one.

To take up only some of its most glaring falsehoods,

(1) There is not already too much labor in the country. True, there is a frightfully overstocked labor-market. But the labor-market is not an institution for getting work done, but for squeezing profit out of getting work done. The more overstocked the labor-market, the more profit can the labor-purchaser, the employer, whack out. Hence the employer intentionally and with malice aforethought keeps the labor-market overstocked on purpose. To say that labor which is superfluous under these conditions is really superfluous, is like a peddler saying he can't get more apples into his measure, when he has a false bottom in it. Knock out the false bottom, more apples will go in. Knock out the labor-market system of doing things, and every foot-pound of labor-power in the country could be turned to beneficial use, with ample room for more.

(2) Immigration does not lower wages. That is steadily and religiously being done by the capitalist class. Of all commodities, labor-power is the only one of which the seller can not regulate the supply. The planter of cotton, the manufacturer of cloth can plow up his sprouting plants, or stop his looms. He can lower his supply to fit the demand, and so ensure himself a good price. The workingman can not. His commodity is part of himself. If he plow up the sprouting fibers of his muscle, or stop the looms of his stomach, he dies. Not only that. While he himself is powerless to reduce the supply of himself, the capitalist, his purchaser, is ever potent to enlarge that supply. Improved machinery, "economies of operation," intensified

labor for some while others are turned off, the elimination of skill, all play their part in increasing over and above the needs of the market, the supply of labor. Immigration is but one of the factors tending this way and hence to lower wages. To say, then, that the stoppage of immigration would raise wages, or even stop their fall, is like the remark of the Orangewoman when her lord and master was carried home on a shutter, that he had two fatal wounds and one that wasn't fatal, and if he got over the one that wasn't fatal he "might stand a chance with the others." Moreover, what a slight factor immigration really is in the lowering of wages was in the last year indicated at McKees Rocks, Bethlehem, New Brunswick, N.J., Ludlow, the shirtwaist shops of New York and the fruit groves of California, in each of which places it was the "foreign" worker—Hungarian, Slavish, Polish, Jewish or Japanese—who led with honor in the fight for higher wages; while the native-born American, in some cases even proudly wrapping himself in the American flag, broke ranks and trudged back to work at the bosses' old terms.

(3) The Anti-Immigration howl both assists the employer to exploit his men more keenly day by day by pitting race against race, and it buttresses him up in the saddle by keeping them divided against themselves. The "Divide and rule" of Rome becomes supplemented by "Divide and fleece." The real enemy of the workers is screened from their view by the Race-Antagonism wool he pulls over their eyes.

(4) Consequent upon the foregoing, all Anti-Immigration effort is for the working class misdirected energy. A man may dose and oil a rheumatic leg, and be tender on it, so long as he thinks he is doomed to it eternally. But he would be a fool to continue so doing once he learns how to cure his rheumatism for good and all. The supposed good which exclusion of immigrants could do the workers would be a dose of rattle-snake oil upon the rheumatic limb of capitalism only; and, as has been shown, a very illusory and ineffectual dose at that. What the age calls upon the working class to do is abolish capitalism altogether. For that the army of labor must be divided by no prejudicial lines of race or color whatsoever—lines which the Anti-Immigration howl tends to create.

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