

Daniel De Leon

Editorial: Suppose They Do!

Another gentleman of the cloth, this time the Rev. W. Sellich, beats on his “pulpit drum ecclesiastic”, and bestows upon the Labor Movement this choice bit of information and advice:

What is required is enlightenment. We all need to “see eye to eye.” The laboring man needs to be brought to see things from the capitalists’ point of view, and the capitalists need equally to be brought to see things from the laborers’ point of view.

Suppose we do!

Here, we shall say, is Workman Blank, whose mind is a blank upon the relations of Capital and Labor, who has absorbed the idea of the “brotherhood” of the two, but who feels the screws squeezing him down further and further. Let us imagine him looking over the shoulders of Capitalist Moneybags and listening to a soliloquy of the latter. Moneybags soliloquizes thus aloud:

“My bank-book shows me I have \$150,000 in bank. A year ago I had \$160,000. It appears from this that I have spent this year \$10,000. That is not very much, considering that I went with my family to the sea shore last summer, and have spent this winter in Florida. Nor can I say I have been wasteful. I only gave 2 dinner parties and 1 ball; I only keep two horses and one carriage; and I only go to the opera about 3 times in the season. Nevertheless, at this rate I shall be penniless in 15 years. That won’t do! I must get money. But how? I don’t know

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how to work, and if I did, it is not “the thing”. Well, I’ve got it! I am going to invest this money in stocks. Matters not what stocks, provided they pay big dividends. Just so. Even if I get only 5 per cent. on my investment that will be \$7,500 a year: and I may get more. Excellent! The workmen in the industry in which I invest my money will have to do the labor. Labor is cheap. Lots of men go about without a job. The workingman can be had for a song. All that they produce over and above what we must let them have to live in a dirty tenement, like horses in stables, we shall keep for our dividends. If they should strike for higher wages we can get the Courts to enjoin them, and if that is not enough, we can call out the militia and give them the rifle diet. That’s easily done. We fool them into voting for our candidates into office, and in this way we got them where the hair is short all around. So; the problem is solved! Guess that is what my father must have done, because how else on earth could he have left me these \$160,000 when he died? I shall now live without labor, and without eating up my substance. My original investment of \$150,000 remains untouched. I shall enjoy life, let the workingman sweat. Thus I shall have solved a triple problem: I shall live comfortably; shall not work; and at the end of the song shall be at least as well off as at the start.” At this point our capitalist turns a summersault in the air and lands on his feet shouting: “Eureka.”

After this soliloquy, let us leave Workingman Blank to his thoughts digesting “things from the capitalist point of view”, and let us transpose Mr. Capitalist Moneybags to a labor meeting held in a little back room of a two-decker tenement house, where he overhears the following address delivered by a workingman to his fellows, and is thus enabled “to see things from the laborers’ point of view.” The address runs thus:

“Labor produces all wealth; nevertheless, we the laborers are poor, while the idle capitalists are rich. How is this possible? It happens because they have taken possession of the capital and the land without which we cannot labor. We must hire

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ourselves out to them, and we receive only a small portion of the product of our own labor, while they keep the swag. The more Labor produces the wealthier the capitalist becomes, but Labor does not improve one step; on the contrary, it goes down because machinery is now steadily displacing hands, and the unemployed beat wages down. What can we do? Strike? The day of the strike is gone. There are too many of us going about hungry, who would jump into the strikers' places; and if these don't come soon enough, the courts and the militias will indict, enjoin and bayonet us back to work. And after all, if we win, how much good does it do us? Does a strike place into our hands the machinery of production? No! On the contrary, the strike and the boycott start from the principle that the capitalist shall preserve the machinery of labor which we ourselves have produced and which he has sponged out of us. There is no help for us now, at any rate, unless we, the working class, resume our implements of labor. These implements have now become so gigantic that no one man can operate them. It takes the whole of society to operate them. Let society, all of us collectively, own them. Then we shall be our own employers and no idle capitalist can exist upon our toil. This is our only salvation. But how to go about it? Simply by profiting by the lesson we have been learning that our interests and those of the capitalist are not those of brothers but of mortal enemies; by wrenching from these capitalists, through a political party of Labor, the power of the State, taking into our own hands the Courts, the militias, the Legislatures, etc., and using these in the interests of the people to establish the Co-operative Commonwealth. Thus the idle class of capitalists must die out. He who would not work must die. Brothers! The alternative before us is: 'Shall the idle class of capitalists continue and we become slaves; or shall we, i.e., the people, become free, though the idle capitalist class perish?' I know I voice your sentiments when I say: 'Perish the capitalist class'. Yes, the world is not broad enough to hold us and them. One or the other must go. We are determined to survive."

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The Rev. W. Sellich makes a great tactical mistake by suggesting that these two opposites—Capitalist and Workmen—should know each other better. The chances of the capitalist's holding out are in direct ratio with the ignorance of the workingman upon the capitalist's "point of view." The capitalist has not yet been swept out of the land just because his "point of view" was not fully understood by labor; but just in proportion as labor has become better and better acquainted with that "point of view" their relations have become more and more strained, and the irrepressible warfare between the two more acute.

The Rev. W. Sellich is an unwise friend of his capitalist pesholders.

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*A De Leon editorial transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the
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