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EDITORIAL

## How to Increase the Common Capacity for Consumption

By DANIEL DE LEON

In our last issue we commented upon a remarkable article in the *Journal of Commerce*,<sup>1</sup> which went to show that the revolution in production, together with the high degree of perfection attained by the methods of production brought society face to face with a new problem of surpassing importance. We also pointed out that, despite its many excellent features, the article betrayed here and there capitalist habits of thought that prevented the writer from boldly launching forward to the self-evident solution. We wish to point out to-day one interesting respect illustrative of this point. The writer says:

“The only wholesome remedy for this condition of affairs must be found in an increase of the common capacity for consumption.”

A leading defect of capitalist thought is the ignorance of the existence of a class struggle between the possessing or capitalist class and the propertiless or working class. Capitalist thought, being unscientific, knows naught of the fact that the biologic law of the struggle of the species is reproduced in the sociologic law of the struggle of the classes. Each class seeks to defend and perpetuate its interests. The class interests of Capital push to the aggregation of larger and larger wealth into the hands of that class. To give up that policy is to abandon its stand and surrender its existence. To “increase the common capacity for consumption” means to increase in the hands of the masses, i.e., of the working class, the money value of the fruits of their labor; the fruits of the workers’ labor is the pile from which now wages are taken for the worker and profits—interest, dividends, rent—are appropriated for the idler or capitalist. Hence it follows that to increase the workers’ “capacity for consumption” is tantamount to reducing the idlers’ (capitalists’) fleecings (profits). In other words, the

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<sup>1</sup>“Scenting Danger; A Capitalist Economist on Impending Social Crisis,” *The People*, June 21, 1896. (Not included here.) The article as answer to one printed by the *New York Journal of Commerce* on June 10 under the title, “Some Bottom Causes of the Depression.”—R.B.

suggestion of remedying existing evils by “increasing the common capacity for consumption” means to leave extant the capitalist system with its class of oppressing and fleecing capitalists, but demanding of them that they disgorge part of their stealings. As well suggest that the dangers of the jungle be remedied by inducing the tiger to be less ferocious and voracious.

No doubt the “common capacity for consumption” must be increased. But to take up the subject of present social distress from that side is putting the cart before the horse. The existing low common capacity for consumption is not the cause of the existing distress; it is the result of an evil which consists in the privat ownership of the tools of production. These tools have to be operated collectively; without access to them labor cannot exercise its functions; being thus lamed, the masses are compelled to work for starvation wages, and thus the “common capacity for consumption” must inevitably be lowered.

The only remedy is the abolition of the social system that deprives the worker of the ownership of his product. The common capacity for consumption can be increased only by the overthrow of the sponging class of capitalists. Then only, and not before, will order prevail and wretchedness disappear. Capitalism must go.

[Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.](#)

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