

# The People.

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## Autonomous Classes.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**S**ignior Toniolo, advertised from Europe as a great and good church dignitary, is the latest “apostle of the working class” who has entered the field of the Social or Labor Question under the banner of “Christian Socialism.”

Signior Toniolo steps forward with a very full, a very elaborate programme to solve the Social Problem, and establish personal liberty and happiness on earth. It will be enough to consider one of Signior Toniolo’s planks to form an opinion of his whole plan. It is this:

“In the political field, to make use of the present system of universal suffrage for the election of special representatives of the working class by the side of the others in the existing parliaments, and in this way to bring influence to bear on equitable and harmonious, social and economic legislation, and, later, on the reform of the parliamentary system itself, on the basis of a standard of autonomous representation of the classes.”

Autonomous representation of the classes!

The classes are marked by the power, that is, the magnitude of the means of production in their hand; and, as a result of that, by the power they have over one another.

The capitalist class is that class that holds so large a quantity of capital that it can defy competition.

The middle class is that class that holds so small a quantity of capital that it can not compete with the capitalist class.

The proletariat, or working class, is that class that is wholly stripped of capital.

This relative power, or weakness, or total absence of the weapons needed for

production, that constitutes the chief mark of the classes, carries in its train certain results that add to the distinction and characteristics of the classes.

Possessed of sufficient weapons of production, the capitalist class becomes a dominant class: the existence of the middle class is made by it less and less tenable, while it can dispose absolutely over the existence of the working class, which, bereft of all means of production, cannot set in operation its labor function, therefore cannot earn a living unless allowed to by the capitalist class, and, consequently, is a dependent, a serf, if not a slave class.

The existence of classes must be predicated upon the capitalist system. This, indeed, is Signior Toniolo's idea, as it is the idea of all "Christian Socialists." But he who says capitalism, or private ownership of the machinery of production, and classes, says at the same time MASTER and SLAVE. "Autonomous classes," or "autonomous representation of the classes," is, accordingly, as senseless, as contradictory a notion as "autonomous diseases," or "autonomous representation of diseases" in the parliament of the human body;—and as a nostrum to solve the Labor Problem it is the bizzarrest notion yet set afloat.

"He who talks nonsense well," said the surly yet profound old Dr. Johnson, "knows that he is talking nonsense." It is of secondary importance whether, with Signior Toniolo, it is his intellect or his honesty that limps. The real point of importance worth calling attention to is the fact that just as soon as any adjective or other qualifying word is attached to SOCIALISM—whether that adjective be "Christian" or "Jew," "Democratic" or what not—, the term is but a cloak, to disguise capitalist intentions; is but a sugar coating, to induce the swallowing of capitalist poison; is but a lure to entrap the unwary.

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

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