

EDITORIAL

## CAPITALISM IS THE HANDMAID OF DEATH

By DANIEL DE LEON

**L**AST year the city reached a high water mark in the number of infants who died because of improper or insufficient food, lack of air, and unsanitary tenements. Monday there were twelve infants stricken down by the intense heat. Yesterday there were as many more. The hot weather will swell the list to a still greater extent, and those babies which are left will be so weakened that they will fall easy victims to their surroundings. It may be said without reservation that all are murdered. What is a tenement if it is not a huge deathtrap? When fire comes there are inadequate fire-escapes, and the dwellers are burned to death. When disease breaks out, it is usually confined exclusively to the tenement districts. When the hot weather caused the city to resemble purgatory, the list of heat casualties is made up from the tenement districts.

Such a thing as a disastrous fire in the “better” quarters of the cities is unknown. Such a thing as babies dying because the milk is impure, or because the house resembles a swarming sewer is unknown. All news items of this character originate in the districts where the poor are herded together, and after having been robbed in the factory are so placed that the small wages they receive may be taken from them.

Last year there was an outcry against the slaughter. Was anything done to avert it this year? Are the tenements any healthier? Have the workingmen any greater access to the things that are necessary to the maintenance of the children’s lives. The deaths during the past few days prove that nothing was done, and they also prove that it was intended that nothing should be done. The “cry of indignation” smoothed over a rough place, and left the working class just where it was at first.

The heat and the vile surroundings have weakened the children that have not yet succumbed. The fathers and mothers are also weakened, and the intense toil to which they must submit has weakened them still more. Eighty workers dropped dead at their labor in one day, and the two hundred which dropped stricken and helpless show in some measure that even the strongest are fighting a losing fight. If such is the case

with the grown, what chance is there for the child? Capitalism dictates the wages of the father, and capitalism also dictates whether or not the child shall live.

Those who do the dictating can close their city houses, and go to the country. They can absent themselves from work, and from all thought of it, and still live in comfort. They can do so because millions of men remain in the factories and incessantly grind away in order that the idlers may go to the country. And the men who drop dead or exhausted are an evidence of the intensity of this grinding. It is due to the fact that they continue to grind that the capitalist can go to the country. From the standpoint of the workingman it is an evidence that the reason he drops in his tracks is that he continues to grind. No honest man will refuse to work. All honest men should refuse to work for the exclusive benefit of others. Every humane man seeks the welfare of his children, and wishes to see them grow strong, and be happy. No humane man would do anything that interfered with the most perfect possible development of the child. Yet a man who assists in the perpetuation of capitalism assists also in the perpetuation of the murder that is now going on in the tenement districts. He assists in accumulating misery for the child, and he assists in accumulating misery for his fellow workingmen.

There is no excuse for the conditions that exist. They are neither sane nor productive of good results. There is no reason why the tenement should exist. The working class has, before this, built habitable dwellings, and it could build habitable dwellings for itself. There is no reason why a dealer should be allowed to dilute his milk, "fat" it with chemicals, put soapstone in his bread, or preservatives in his meat. Capitalism allows that, and in fact makes it necessary, so the only thing to do is to strike down capitalism.

There may be another outcry against the conditions in the tenements, and there probably will be. A campaign is coming and the working class will be restless. When it is so it must be cajoled, and it must have promises made to it. Those promises have been made before, and they have never been kept. They will not be kept this time. It is the life of the working class that is at stake, and the working class must be its own protector. This it can only be by battling against capitalism, and striking blows that are meant to kill. The Socialist Labor Party is doing that every day. Join its ranks.

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

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