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EDITORIAL

“PAUPER LABOR MADE PROFITABLE.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

UNDER the above suggestive head a cable message from London is published which goes on to explain that the Holborn Poor Law Guardians have set the inmates of their farm at Mitcham, south of London, to work at gasmaking, tailoring, shoemaking, matmaking, farming and other industries; and that the experiment is highly successful, in that “the profits for the past year amount to \$3,400, the cost of the labor, had it been paid for, being reckoned.”

The first thought that strikes one is this: “How comes it that men, able to make gas, shoes, clothing, mats, etc., land in the Poor House?”

The next thought is this: “In England, the classic land of ‘pure and simpledom,’ or British style of Unionism, and under the presiding genius of such ‘Unionism,’ the workingman is being used like a cow, whose hide, and bones, even after she has been milked into exhaustion, are turned to use.”

Every letter in the above news item is resplendent with its moral. Thrown out of work by improved machinery and capitalist concentration, the workingman has long been the subject of insult on the part of his exploiters. These silenced their consciences—and their paid parsons helped them therein—by pronouncing the thus compulsorily idle workingman a “thrifless, lazy wretch who could, but would not work.” For all that, the “thrifless, lazy wretches” increased. Did their presence serve as a warning to their Unions? Did it preach to these the lesson that the epidemic of “thrifless, lazy wretches” was bound to spread, claiming ever more victims? Did it teach them that the capitalist socio-economic hygienic conditions which they lived in were calculated positively to spread the epidemic, rather than to check it? Did it wake them up to an understanding of the defectiveness of their “pure and simple” plumbing and system of drainage? Did it stir them to the manly effort of seeking to shake off the cause of the evil, by throwing their “pure and simple” Unionism into the lumber-room of antiquity like so much junk, and turning their energies to the uprooting of the capitalist system and the rearing of the

Workers’ Republic? Indeed, not! They clung to their pure and simple plumbing and system of drainage with all the more blind infatuation, and they revered the capitalist system that smote them with all the more idolatrous faith. And the epidemic of “thriftless, lazy wretches” spread apace. Capitalist society had to take charge of the patients. The Poor House, a sort of socio-economic hospital, went up. But cause brought on its effects. The tax-paying capitalist class soon found they were robbing Peter to pay Paul: Out of the profits that they squeezed from the workers the taxes had to be paid. The Poor Houses, accordingly, were draining the plunder in the capitalists’ hand. Final results, the inmates of the Poor House were set to work to produce still more profits. The worker came down to the level of a cow. Rendered useless in his legitimate sphere, virtually killed off from social intercourse, his hide and bones are still available.

The pauper is now made profitable.

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

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