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EDITORIAL

## A BACK NUMBER, AND PROUD OF IT.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**T**HE *American Federationist*, truly the organ of the British or pure and simple style of Unionism, is not merely stupid, but proud of its stupidity. Its issue for this month has an article by A.S. Leitch on “Hard Times” that is simply idiotic, but not satisfied with that, the paper has gone to the trouble of printing the article as an extra, sending it out as a special, and thereby flaunt the low down grade of the pure and simple intellect. It is interesting to examine the thing.

Mr. Leitch admits that there are “hard times,” that is the name the gentleman gives to crises. And he realizes that one is on. How does he account for the phenomenon. These are his own words:

“Take, for instance, a corporation employing 5,000 or more men. There is a desire to squeeze out greater dividends—or, perhaps, the boss stockholder wishes to buy a red automobile (or a Mexican monkey to preside at a drunken banquet at Newport). So up goes a notice in the workshops ‘that on account of the (anticipated) depressed financial conditions, wages will be decreased 25 per cent.’ On pay-day some \$5,000 less goes to the local butchers, bakers, and other business men. These tradesmen hasten to rescind or retrench on orders, and factories and mills a thousand miles away feel the cut. They in turn lay off hands and cut wages.”

One can hardly imagine possible such imbecility!

According to this theory, an industrial phenomenon such as the crisis, that to-day takes in the whole capitalist world, is brought on because one, or say, all capitalists decide to invest in red automobiles, or Mexican monkeys, or in personal extravagance. And the sapient theorizer does not perceive the asininity of his closing paragraph. If the personal extravagance of a capitalist is the cause that

\$5,000 are withheld from the local “butchers, bakers and other business men,” are not these \$5,000 simultaneously steered into the tillers of the “butchers, bakers and other business men” of the locality where the “red automobile or Mexican monkey” are bought? If extravagance in things that can not be bought in the locality and therefore withdraws money from that locality is the cause of hard times in that locality, must it not inevitably follow that the same extravagance that pours money into another locality must bring about flush times there? How then comes it that “mills a thousand miles away feel the cut,{”} and “in turn lay off hands and cut wages”? How comes it that industrial crises are no longer “local” but international?

The above analysis and question dispose of Mr. Leitch’s theory that the personal extravagances of the capitalist are the cause of hard times. The above analysis sufficiently points to the fact that, so far from being the cause, the personal extravagances of the capitalists rather retard the arrival of hard times. These extravagances set free moneys that otherwise would remain locked in the coffers of the individual capitalists, and thereby tend to keep up trade—a phenomenon that has caused another set of owls to imagine that capitalist luxury was the safety valve of trade, and free indulgence in such luxury the solution of the Labor Problem.

Hard times are not produced by personal extravagance, nor can personal extravagance solve the Social Problem.

Hard times, or crises, are the joint product of two twin facts that dove tail into each other—first, the private ownership of the land on and the plant or capital with which wealth is produced; and secondly, the resulting competitive and anarchic system pursued by these private owners.

The first of these causes sentences Labor to the status of merchandise, and consequently keeps it with its nose to the grindstone—only a few days from the soup house.

The second, causes production to be carried on by concerns who cannot separately be correctly informed on the facts needed to decide upon the output. As moreover, these concerns are in the mutual throat-cutting business, politely called competition, they produce infinitely more than they can sell in the end. When the stoppage of sales comes, production stops. And as the workingman only got barely enough to live, stoppage to him means stoppage all along the line.

It follows that, so far from being a force that makes against hard times, the pure and simple trades union is a force that decidedly promotes hard times. The pure and simple trades union aims at preserving capitalism and it aims at helping the capitalists on the theory that their interests are reciprocal. Accordingly, the pure and simple glories in flush times, those being the times when it recruits its membership. But as shown above, flush times are the inevitable precursors of hard times. It is an axiom that the more the working class produces the sooner it throws itself out of work. Having “reciprocal interests with the capitalists,” and the capitalist being anxious to produce plentifully, in sails a pure and simple union to help the capitalists. Moreover, as these unions do not utilize the sunshine of prosperity to make the hay of getting themselves in possession of the government, when the crisis comes they are out in the cold, with the wind blowing upon them from all sides.

Mr. Leitch’s article, of which the *Federationist* seems to be radiantly proud, illustrates that while production has become international, and civilization has the globe for its basis, the pure and simple union is still a “local” affair, has its horizon bounded by conditions that no longer exist.

And Mr. Leitch is a luminary in that camp, and the other luminaries are proud of him!

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

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[slpns@igc.org](mailto:slpns@igc.org)