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EDITORIAL

THINGS GETTING BETTER.

By DANIEL DE LEON

CLEAR sighted is Dr. Lucy A. Bannister. No sentimental nonsense obscures her perception of things or befuddles her tongue in the telling of them. Golden truth, and that only, poured from her lips when she informed the Welfare department of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. that it is “not philanthropy, but sound investment for manufacturers to look after the comfort of employes.”¹

How time has ripped the sham off these “welfare” schemes! Time was, when to deny their philanthropy and point out their purely employer-benefiting character was to set oneself down as a “cynic,” a “pessimist,” a “hair-splitter.” Now it is the very advocates of the policy who shamelessly expose its inward nature—and do it as a means of enlisting support.

It has even got to be the fashion in young ladies’ courses in Economics to herald these “Welfarisms” as proofs that—in opposition to the wicked Socialists’ claim—“things are getting better every day.” A capitalist organ whose remedy for strikes is the rifle-diet was heard quite recently giving voice to the same sentiment.

The point which all these trumpeters of things getting better are afraid to meet is this: In what way do welfare schemes at their level best differ from the conduct of the farmer who treats his live-stock well? The wise farmer gives his horses suitable

¹ [Although the phrase has fallen out of vogue today, some familiar examples of what company-provided “welfare,” or “welfare work,” included are such workplace facilities and services as lunchrooms, restrooms, washrooms, gymnasiums, libraries, swimming pools, hospital and dispensary services, physical examinations, dental treatment, banking and loan services, housing, educational classes, playgrounds and other recreational facilities, music, lectures, and other entertainments, etc. Facilities and services such as these usually were not available in 19th-century factories and other workplaces, and not all capitalists make use of all of them even today. In the past, workers sometimes referred to this “welfare work” as “helfare work,” and often regarded it as a form of paternalism and an attempt to substitute charity for justice on the job. As De Leon noted in this 1911 editorial, however, there was no charity in it then—and we may add that there is no charity in the similar schemes of today.—*R.B.*]

food, and his cows clean stalls. He avoids overworking them, and when they fall ill expert care is theirs. But through it all, he insists that they remain his live-stock—his source of profits.

What fits the farmer fits the employer. Alarmed at the inroads his exploitation was making into working class vigor and productivity, he now essays the welfare tack. He will give his wage slaves light factories, he will give them reading rooms; he will plant flower beds about their homes; he may even install alarm clocks for their convenience. But through it all he also insists that they remain his wage slaves, his source of profits.

What concerns the workingman to-day is not whether he is treated well or ill as live-stock; the thorn that pricks is that he is live-stock at all. Welfare plans, however lavish, do not make for the abolition of his live-stock condition. Insofar as they tend to pad the yoke, they make for perpetuating it. As such they are signs, not that things are growing better, but that they are growing steadily worse.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
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slpns@slp.org