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EDITORIAL

“SALARIES” AND “WAGES.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

WELL aware of the risk we run of being denounced by our opponents in the camp of the capitalist parties as “evil-minded,” and an illustration of the evil-mindedness of Socialists generally, we say deliberately: Attorney General Carmody’s opinion that corporations must pay wages weekly, an opinion that is being praised by the combined press of Plunderbund as mightily in favor of the workers of this State, is nothing of the sort; nor will it be put to such uses;—far otherwise and to the contrary.

On the statute books of the State is a law called “Mechanics’ Lien.” The title was not taken at haphazard. It was chosen deliberately, as one to betoken “love for labor.” The title conveys the idea that the mechanic is to be protected against the rapacity of contractors and builders. If wages are due him for work done on a building, and, whether he fears fraud or not, he files his claim with the County Clerk, then he is sure of not having worked for naught. The filing of his claim is a lien upon the building. If the worst comes to the worst, the mechanic can have his claims deducted from the contractors’s contract price. That is the theory of the Mechanics’ Lien, indeed, that is also the language of the statute, that is, of a few paragraphs, the smaller portion of the statute. Under cover of the title and of a few paragraphs concerning mechanics, the larger portion of the statute protects, not Labor, but dealers—dealers in building material—in other words capitalists. What with this, and the court facilities that the law’s delays and expenses involve, for every dollar that the Mechanics’ Lien insures to Labor from Labor’s wages, thousands of dollars are insured to dealers.

By the light of the practical workings of the Mechanics’ Lien, so-called, Attorney General Carmody’s opinion in favor of “weekly payment of wages” may be read.

It is often a difficult thing to draw the line in the Census figures between “sala-

ries” and “wages.” Not infrequently the drawing of the line is next to impossible. Absolutely impossible it is to draw the line truthfully in most of the reports filed by corporations in the offices of the corresponding State officials. The trick is done by lumping the amounts paid to supernumeraries, pets of the corporations’ Directors, with the amounts paid, or, supposed to have been paid to the corporation’s wage-earners. The “wages” of these pets are always far larger than the wages of any wage-earner. The trick helps to conceal the smallness of the actual wages paid. The fictitious “average” does the concealing.

A decision in favor of weekly payments of wages to the pets, is a convenience to the pet owners, on the same principle that it was this identical tribe that caused the enactment of a law ordering them not to give passes on their railroads, and rendering the giving of passes a criminal offence. The law saved the tribe the inconvenience of refusing passes. Thenceforth they could throw the blame on the law, and did. With a decision the practical effect of which is to pay weekly salaries, the smaller stockholders must pocket their objections to a practice that tends to lower the dividends which finally might, could, would, or should filter down to them.

Capitalist government means government by and for capitalists, a thing that, in turn, means government for the top-capitalist. From that quarter the workers need expect nothing but gold bricks.

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