

EDITORIAL

EASY LESSON NO. 2.

By DANIEL DE LEON

“**T**HEY [the Socialists] wish to do away with private property,” is a second reason why the Rev. F.X. Van Nistelroy objects to Socialists and Socialism in his series of articles entitled “Popular Instructions on Pope Leo’s Letter.”

Now, dear Father—

There is a department of science called political economy.

Political economy deals with the laws of wealth, production and distribution.

Wealth is not an accurately definable subject. Nothing is in science. Everything shades off into something else. All the same, science takes types. They are definable for all practical purposes.

Wealth, according to the science of political economy, is a thing that combines certain qualities:—

It must be the product of labor, and it must satisfy certain physical needs.

Once wealth is produced, it falls into two categories:—

One portion of wealth is consumed in the direct or indirect gratification of physical or human needs; the other portion, tho’ also consumed, is not consumed in that manner: it is consumed in producing more wealth.

While “wealth” is the product of labor, “property” is the creature of society. “Property” is a term that covers a wider field than “wealth.” “Property” means wealth held and owned according to some system established by society.

That portion of wealth which is turned to the production of more wealth is, to-day, private property.

The private property of the wealth that is needed to produce more wealth becomes in modern society “capital.”

Capital is a thing that combines certain qualities:—

First, it must be the product of labor; this it must be because it is wealth and must share the natal quality of wealth.

Second, it must be operated by others than its owner; indeed, capital requires its being operated by many others.

Third, it must have for its social accompaniment the existence of a proletariat, that is, a class of people who can not set their labor-power into operation without the consent of the owner of capital.

The consequence of “Capital” is that its owner can and does live without work: he lives on the sweat of the brow of others: these others are the proletariat, or wage-slave class.

Socialism demands that that portion of wealth which becomes capital shall be owned, not privately, but collectively, so that its operation shall be a blessing to all and a curse to none.

On the other hand Socialism insists that that portion of wealth the use of which consists in being consumed shall be private property, the property of those who produced it, instead of being, as to-day, the property of those who do not produce it, but who appropriate it by virtue of the legalized robber of existing institutions.

Now, Father dear, if you get this straight you will understand what Socialism is, and what Socialists want. When you “catch on” you will retract that heathenishly loose statement about Socialists wishing to do away with private property.

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