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EDITORIAL

A TEST OF SOUNDNESS

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE Trades Union Question is up again. Again? Of course—and never will be down, as a “Question”, until the Socialist Republic, of which it is a premonition, rears its proud front upon the ruins of the Bourgeois Republic. As yet the question is very much in a tangle. It must be admitted that the Trades Unionist idea itself is still in a crude stage of development. Nevertheless, the inherent soundness of the position is such that even the arguments from the hostile quarter of capitalism, intended to blow up the Trades Union idea, frequently contribute materially to unravel the tangle and to ripen the principle to the mature stage of development when it will fulfill its mission. The New York *Sun* furnishes an illustration in point.

The *Sun* pronounces as an “essential weakness of Unionism” that “it declines to bear its share of the burden” in the ups and downs of trade. The *Sun* is right. But therein it does not, as it imagines, point to a vulnerable spot that will cause the Union’s downfall. What the *Sun* does is unwillingly and unwittingly call attention to a weakness that must and will be corrected—or, to be more accurate, it points out a feature of immaturity in effective Unionism.

Labor is the sole producer of the wealth needed to support life. Any other view plunges in the absurdity that Idleness can be a producer. The first conclusion derived from the economically sound principle is that Labor should be the sole disposer of the fruit of its efforts. But the conclusions do not end there. Rights imply duties. The right to dispose of a thing implies the duty to bear all the burdens incidental thereto. While the capitalist produces not a pin-head’s worth of wealth, nevertheless he has burdens to bear under the capitalist system. The burdens on his shoulders proceed from his private ownership of the necessaries for work and production. True, he does no work himself: all the work is done by paid employes.

Nevertheless, his private ownership exposes him to the risk of losing it all in the process of the chicanery, that capitalism forces him to practise upon his competitors, and that they are forced to practise upon him. Stripped of the necessities of production the capitalist would have to go to work—a horrid risk! Trades Unionism, that is, the bulk of Unionism, stands to-day in the contradictory position of justly claiming for Labor the sole force in production, and wanting some or all the advantages of the fact, and yet unjustly desiring, and by its vote striving, to keep up the system of Capitalism, thereby leaving upon the shoulders of the individual capitalist the burden of a serious risk.

Such a position is untenable. Nor will it long continue. Trades Unionism will advance to the point where it will square its burdens with its rights. It will supplement the fact of its being the sole force which creates wealth and the sole force that should enjoy it, with the principle that the burden of capitalism must be removed from the shoulders of the capitalist—which means the abolition of the capitalist class.

It ever is a sign of a sound central position that its foes' assaults only aid to clarify it, and point the path it must tread to ultimate success.

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

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slpns@slp.org