

# DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 2, NO. 204.

NEW YORK, MONDAY, JANUARY 20, 1902.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

## STICK TO YOUR MARXISM!

By DANIEL DE LEON

**M**ARXISM is not to be defined by any one term. No technical term can be thus defined. Technical terms are made up of many elements. One of the elements that goes to make up Marxism is deep reverence for facts. Applying this Marxian element to the study of both Capitalism and the pure and simple, or British style of Trades Unionism, the quotation from the *Evening Post*, recently examined, renders material aid in properly appreciating the conflict between both and the fate of that conflict.

It was while criticizing certain recent strikes, ordered with the design of securing the discharge of men who worked too rapidly, that the *Post* made the pregnant observation which we shall here consider for a third time. It was this:

“Nothing need be said of the disastrous influence of this policy upon the industries involved, or of its effect in holding back the more efficient workmen, and leveling down to the standard of the poorest men, instead of allowing the best to set the pace.”

In the passage quoted one perceives two distinct and opposing tendencies. One is that of the pure and simple Union, the other of the capitalist. Looked at closer, what is the motive spring of each, and its effect, if successful?

The pure and simple Union seeks to give work to the largest number, and also the largest measure of earnings. But it does not seek these ends with a class-conscious mind. It does not seek to abolish the capitalist system. On the contrary. It seeks those desirable ends with a capitalist mind. Accordingly, it knows nothing about the class interests of the workers; it is sodden in the notion that the existing system of private ownership in the means of production is right, and that it has interests in common with its employer. But what it imagines does not change facts. The capitalist system moves onward unperturbed. The effects are felt by pure and

simplesdom; and it then seeks to adjust itself to the effects. One of these effects is the displacement of labor by improved methods of production. This effect pure and simplesdom seeks to counteract by forbidding rapid work. The slower work is done the more men are needed. But improvement continues. It follows that work would have to be done ever slower. The pure and simple method of meeting the development of capitalism leads, accordingly, to social stand-still; and this is but another word for “smash the machine.” That much for the pure and simple side.

How about capitalism? Whether capitalism is conscious or unconscious of what it does cuts no ice. The capitalist seeks to turn out wealth at the smallest cost. Only in that way can he compete successfully. To this end the methods of production are steadily improved. The more improved the method, the fewer are the men he needs; nor is that all; the more improved the method of production is, all the intenser becomes the work of his men, and all the more favorable are the opportunities for further intensification. Obviously, to work slower would be to nullify the improvement in the method of production. Indeed, to slack up work is the last thing the capitalist proposes to do. His cue is fast work; ever faster, more intense and rapid work. But improvement in methods continues. It follows that work has to be done with ever greater rapidity and intensity. The capitalist method of meeting the development of capitalism leads, accordingly, to the wholesale and rapid consumption of workers' lives. The point was recently emphasized in these columns by a quotation from a capitalist machinists' journal in which the statement occurred that a machinist out of work at a certain age would find work with difficulty: if he “exerted himself” during the term of his employment he would now be a wreck, and could not be used; if, on the contrary, he was in good physical condition, it was a sign that he did “not properly exert himself”, his good physical appearance would keep him from getting work. That much for the capitalist side.

Two such opposing tendencies never compromise. One or the other wins, and the other goes down. Vain are all theories as to what the originally pure and simple Trades Union might, could or should develop into. Its history is a fact that sets all theory at rest. In the conflict between the capitalist tendency to wholesale slaughter the workmen, and the pure and simple tendency to bring on social standstill, both capitalist and pure and simple Union stand upon the same field, to wit, the correctness of the capitalist system of private ownership in the means of production.

In a conflict thus conducted, and upon such a field, all logic stands and fights on the side of the capitalist. He wins. He won. The coalition of the Gomperses with the Hannas proves it.

No error is graver than to imagine that the economic organization of the workers if wrongly stated, can ever be rightly switched. The pure and simple system of labor organization is like the first step in the line of the parabola. Every step thereafter is bound to move along that curve,—and to wind up as one of the “charms” hanging from the fob of Hannadom.

**Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.  
Uploaded August 2006**