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EDITORIAL

SELF-CONVICTED CAPITALISM.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THERE is nothing so damaging to criminals as their own confessions of guilt. By means of such confessions the ends of criminal justice are attained with certainty and {without} unnecessary expenditure, so convincing and complete are they.

Capitalism is repeatedly self-convicted. Its results are often so atrocious that even its defenders and upholders are compelled to cry out against and condemn them. Such outcries and such condemnations—such confessions—serve the aims of social and economic justice as the confessions of thieves and murderers serve the aims of criminal justice.

In the many indictments brought by Socialism against capitalism and the capitalist class there are two of great importance: First, that capitalism is a system of profit-making that is continued regardless of human life and social well-being; second, that the capitalist class, which absorbs the profit, is a useless class, that performs no duties, but delegates them to the hired employees who create the wealth from which that profit is derived.

These indictments are sustained by a capitalist confession such as that already alluded to.

A writer in the *Evening Post*, in an instructive article on “Railroads and Accidents,” points out that the horrible slaughter on railroads is not mitigated because it does not pay. Says he:

“It has become a truism that ‘capital is timid’; that ‘corporations have no souls,’ and the reason why is plain enough: Where a large plant may be rendered valueless in a night by the announcement of an invention which supersedes it; where the best mechanical device of to-day may become obsolete to-morrow, it is not strange that railway boards of direction must go slowly in

permitting changes which involve large initial expenditures.”

The results of this policy of not making changes because they do not pay, are shown in a list of killed and injured, which, as the *Evening Post* writer states, is “horrifying enough, and yet it is a matter of common knowledge that many a death and injury escapes the records.” With this he gives “the records” as follows:

For the Ten Years Ending With 1900.

Killed—Passengers, 2,574; employees, 21,847; others, 44,416; total, 68,837; average per year, 6,883.

Injured—Passengers, 31,020; employees, 299,217; others, 57,566; total 387,803; average per year, 38,780.

Total killed and injured—Passengers, 33,594; employees, 321,064; others, 101,982; total, 456,640; average per year, 45,663.

In commenting on these “records,” the *Post* writer says:

“This is bad enough, but it is not the worst. The rate of increase is shocking, and in the year 1900 every single item of the above schedule was greater than in the year before.”

So much for the first of the Socialist indictments. Now for the second. Who are these “railway boards of direction,” according to the *Post* writer?

“Most of these boards are composed of men who are without special knowledge; most of them, probably, know little more of the properties which they direct than is shown by the Treasurer’s reports, and their appreciation of the needs of the management is colored by the size of the annual dividend.”

Again:

“How are a dozen financial men, whose accumulations grew from a successful banking business, dry goods shop, or brewery, to know whether the railway affairs which they are presumed to direct are conducted in the most enlightened manner? The best general manager, to them, is the one who can show the least cost of operation per train-mile. The manager, for his part, knows that a profitably conducted business is the reason for his employment, and so he, by the facts of this knowledge, is precluded from rendering a correct judgment (except in rare instances) as to whether or not any but the most obvious expenses shall be incurred.”

Here, then, we have the whole story. Here, then, we have a capitalist writer making

such confessions of fact as prove the Socialist indictments, viz., that capitalism is a system of profit-making continued regardless of human life and social well-being; and that the capitalist class, which absorbs the profit, is a useless class, that performs no duties, but delegates them to hired employees who create the wealth from which that profit is derived.

Who would fail, with this confession before him, to condemn capitalism as readily and as quickly as he would a self-convicted criminal? and who would not hasten to visit social justice upon it with the certainty and economy that criminal justice is visited upon thieves and murderers?

Capitalism and the capitalist class must go. In place of them we must have a system in which production, distribution and transportation will be operated for use and not for profit. The wealth appropriated by the murderous and useless capitalist class will make such a system possible and permit of its being maintained in a manner that will insure and protect the life of passengers and employees alike!

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