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FIRST EDITORIAL

GIFTS—CHRISTMAS AND OTHERWISE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THIS is the season of gift-making. “The feeling o’ Christmas time,” to quote the Hoosier poet, permeates the atmosphere, appealing to the generous impulses in a manner productive of excessive raids on the family and individual and enjoyable exchange of presents on all sides. So much is this so, that already the magnitude of the giftmaking this year is being set forth in long articles containing statistics of shoppers and sales, the volume of mail handled by the post office, and the distributions of the charity and other organizations. In the midst of this voluntary presentation of tokens of charity, esteem and love—this season of good cheer and will—the classconscious worker cannot help reflecting, by way of contrast, on the involuntary giftmaking that his class—the working class—is compelled to indulge in all the year around. Talk of the magnitude of Christmas gifts! The involuntary gift of four-fifths of its product that Labor makes to Capital dwarfs them into insignificance. In manufactures ALONE it amounts to the stupendous sum of ten thousand millions a year. It is this involuntary gift, enabling as it does, the capitalist class to further acquire control of land and capital, that gives to that class its vast economic and political power—a sway, and a life of luxury that surpass the most daring flights of the imagination indulged in by the ruling classes of old. And what has the working class received in exchange? A recent book makes clear that what the working class has received in exchange is poverty, unemployment, woman and child labor, death, injury and disease, overwork, underpay and neglect in old age. Says the author of this book:

“There are probably in fairly prosperous years no less than 10,000,000 persons in poverty, that is to say, underfed, underclothed and poorly housed. Of these about 4,000,000 are public paupers. Over 2,000,000 workingmen are unemployed from four to six months in the year * * * * Nearly half of the families in the country are propertiless. Over

1,700,000 little children are forced to become wage-earners when they should be in school. About 5,000,000 women find it necessary to work and about 2,000,000 are employed in factories, mills, etc. Probably no less than 1,000,000 workers are injured or killed each year while doing their work, and about 10,000,000 persons now living will, if the present ratio is kept up, die of the preventable disease, tuberculosis. We know that many workmen are overworked and underpaid. We know in a general way that unnecessary disease is far too prevalent. We know some of the insanitary evils of tenements and factories; we know of the neglect of the street child, the aged, the infirm, the crippled. Furthermore, we are beginning to realize the monstrous injustice of compelling those who are unemployed, who are injured in industry, who have acquired diseases due to their occupation, or who have been made widows or orphans by industrial accidents, to become paupers in order that they may be housed, fed and clothed.”

Such is the return Labor receives for its involuntary and stupendous gift to Capital. Were it not for the ever-present horrors of this return, the season of gift-making culminating in Christmas, would be without blemish. As it is, their recollection obtrudes itself amid the good cheer and will be prevalent for the time being. And they will continue to so mar all our festivities until they are abolished along with the system creating them—the capitalist system—and Socialism is substituted in its stead. Then will Labor reap the full product of its toil, and its involuntary gift to Capital cease.

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