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EDITORIAL

“THE MINER’S OPPORTUNITY.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

WHEN John Mitchell stated in his verbose book, *Organized Labor*,¹ that the great bulk of the workingmen, especially the coal miners, could never be anything but workingmen, a great howl of dissent went up. And this too, despite the fact that Mitchell aimed thereby to do the capitalist class a service. He showed that since there must be a laboring and a capitalist class there must also be an *amiable* method of working between them, despite their antagonistic relations as exploited and exploiter. This amiable method is the trade agreement, by which labor is systematically hypnotized and prevented from rising in spontaneous and periodic revolt against its fleecers, the capitalist class. Nevertheless, Mitchell was vociferously denounced. He was called an un-American believer in caste, a destroyer of the incentive to labor, an enemy of the American ideal of advancement and success, a disparager of American opportunities for all, and a few other things too diabolical to even hint at.

But Truth, like Murder, will out in unexpected ways and places. Mr. John H. Jones is President of the Pittsburg-Buffalo Coal Company. On September 27, Mr. Jones addressed the Pennsylvania State Editorial Association in Pittsburg. His address has since been printed in pamphlet form and sent to all the newspapers; we have a copy before us. On Page 14, under the sub-head, “The Miner’s Opportunity,” the following gem of advice, and, by way of reflex, picture of working class conditions, may be read:

“When we take into consideration the fact that twenty-five years ago from five thousand to twenty thousand dollars was the prevailing amount expended in the development of a coal mine with a capacity of fifteen

¹ [*Organized Labor: Its Problems, Purposes and Ideals and the Present and Future of American Wage Earners*, Mitchell, John, American Book and Bible House, Pa., 1903. 436 Pages.]

thousand to thirty thousand tons per annum, and that to-day it costs from two hundred and fifty thousand to one million dollars to equip one of our modern mines, and that they are now capable of producing from five hundred thousand to one and a half million tons of coal per annum, you can readily see why it is necessary for mine foremen and managers to take advantage of every opportunity to improve their education so they may be enabled to equip and operate such large enterprises to the best advantage. With the opportunity of attending our excellent night schools, as well as the advantages to be derived from a technical course in a school of correspondence, it is possible for a miner, whatever his early education may have been, who has executive ability and untiring application, to fit himself within a comparatively short time to hold a position which will pay him from three thousand to ten thousand dollars per year, or even more, and this without interfering with his occupation as a miner or employe in and around a coal mine. It is within the power of you newspaper men to encourage these men to improve their condition, and I know you will do it."

This, then, is "the miner's opportunity." Does it enable the miner to become an independent mine owner, and thus raise himself out of the working into the capitalist class? Mr. Jones' words do not convey that idea; far from it. Those words leave no doubt that "the miner's opportunity," at best, consists in becoming a salaried subordinate to a great corporation, in competition with his numerous fellow employes. This soon makes Mr. Jones' princely salaries the exception, and not the rule. What "the miner's opportunity" is at its worst, Mr. Jones sayeth not; for though he grows enthusiastic over Pittsburg and its "undreamed-of prosperity," giving reams of statistics on its coal, iron, steel and coke tonnage, he carefully refrains from telling the number of miners out of work and the wages paid them when at work. Statistics become an unknown science to the otherwise scientific Mr. Jones when it comes to such things. The trouble is that miners' work and wages don't make for "prosperity," "undreamed-of" or otherwise superlative; for they show that last year, the miners of Pennsylvania were employed only 204 days; and received only \$2.26 for every day worked, or \$1.24 a day for every day of the year. "The miner's opportunity," at its worst, is one of little work and little rations.

What is here said applies to other divisions of labor: "the miner's opportunity" is typical of the opportunities of the great bulk of the working class. The vast majority of the working class can no more get out of the working class into the capitalist class than a cannon ball can soar, balloon-like, into space. One is held

down as firmly by the law of capitalist economics as the other is held down by the law of physics. Capital presupposes wage labor and wage labor presupposes capital. As long as Capitalism endures so long will, of necessity, this relationship of exploiter and exploited also endure. Capitalism cannot exist without it; in fact, its necessities demand its extension. Socialism alone will end this relationship. Aided by evolution, which is making industry social in operation and effect, via the corporation and the trust, Socialism will make industry social in ownership also. Then wealth will not be a means of class exploitation by a few called capitalists, but of the advancement of the many, known as society, democratically and industrially organized. Capital will disappear; and with it the capitalist class. Thus all workingmen should labor against Mitchell’s trade agreement, with its perpetuation of capitalism, and in favor of the Co-operative Commonwealth and Socialism. In this lies their opportunity for progress; and in this only! All else is wage slavery.

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