

Daniel De Leon

Editorial: State Socialism—Take Warning!

The wages of the firemen on the Toledo, St. Louis & Kansas City Railroad have been reduced \$21 a month. This reduction was effected for the purpose of raising the wages of the upper employes—the clerks and officers—who are the relatives, sons, cousins, brothers and chums, of the ruling and semi-ruling class, of people who find it impossible to be “independent” capitalists, but who not therefore would give up the capitalist instinct of wishing to live upon the sweat of the brow of the toilers.

The Toledo, St. Louis & Kansas City Railroad is in the hands of a receiver; a receiver is in the nature of a government official; accordingly the road may be said to be controlled by the government.

Here then we have a striking illustration of State Socialism, and of what the working class may expect from such a system.

Organized Socialism, i.e., Social Democracy, as represented by the Socialist Labor Parties of the world, is the movement of the working class to gain for itself possession of the land and all its instruments of production, to the end of abolishing the system under which one class toils and hungers, while another idles and feasts; under which the harder the toil, the lighter the pay; under which a privileged class is bred and the masses are held in dependence. The goal of organized Socialism is the Co-operative or Socialist Commonwealth, where the exploited could not be because the exploiters would have {no} ground to stand on.

But their is a good deal of floating, crude, vaporous{,}

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unorganized Socialistic thought in the air, and those who are seized with such microbes are prone to imagine that, since all collective ownership presupposes some central directing authority, State ownership, ownership by the State, as at present constituted, of the land and machinery of production, is Socialism. This is a grave confusion of thought, but the worst of it is the false tactics it is apt to lead to. Among the many, who should be in the camp of organized Socialism, fighting in the ranks of the Socialist Labor Party, but who still stay out, not a few believe in a “gradual,” “one thing at a time” nationalization of industries. And seeing now this new party then that, of the many that spring up and melt away, proposes to place under State ownership one or two industries—railroads for instance—they leap to the conclusion that such parties are “Socialistic,” that “they go our way,” and blame organized Socialism for not falling in line.

What is now happening with the firemen on the Toledo, St. Louis & Kansas City Railroad should be a wholesome eye-opener on the subject of State Socialism in contrast with the aims and principles as expressed by organized Socialism. The railroad line in question is now under the control of the Government, and yet the treatment the firemen receive is, if anything, worse than they received when private persons controlled it.

The capitalist State is an aggravated capitalist private individual. If an industry is placed in the hands of the Government by a capitalist party, the treatment of the real workers will be but slightly, if at all, better than before; no party that does not carry a full programme for collective ownership ever would, or could be controlled—manned and officered—by the working class itself; all scheme of nationalization will be capitalistic in its nature, it will be hurtful to the workers, and its hurtfulness would increase in proportion as one industry after the other would come under State ownership, because the transfer would be carried on upon capitalist principles by capitalist officials.

State Socialism—Take Warning!

The State can not be purged of its capitalist soul but by the working class, and not until it is actually controlled by them. With them in power and only then, could the goal of the international organized Socialist movement be reached and the Co-operative Commonwealth reared.

State ownership of industries under capitalist ownership of the State would be State Socialism—a system of slavery more intolerable than any the world has yet experienced.

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*A De Leon editorial transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the
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