

Daniel De Leon

Editorial: An Open Letter

To Mrs. Walston Hill Brown,
President Child Welfare League.
New York,

Dear Madam—

As you will have learned from the marked copy of the *Daily People*, that was forwarded to you, the notice with which you favored us of the mass meeting, which was to be held at the Ethical Culture Society under the auspices of the Child Welfare League, was duly inserted, with a few corrections.

We wish to explain the reasons for the principal corrections that we made.

The sentence that the speakers would “discuss the questions from the standpoint of the worker and the general public” was corrected to read: “discuss the questions raised by the bills.”

We hold that expressions which contrast “the worker” and “the general public” are, besides being fundamentally defective, peculiarly harmful at this season:

What is left of the “general public” when “the worker” element is subtracted? The majority of our population are workers, or of the Workers Class, that is, the proletariat, or wage-slave. Sentences in which “the worker” and “the general public” are placed in juxtaposition convey an impression that is at war with the fact. The division of society into “the workers” and “the general public” is as

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unscientific as would be the classification of people into “males,” “females” and “minors.” The unscientific division opens wide the doors for, and invites the error, that, while “the worker” may have equities, that are to be considered, there is another element, likewise vested with equities; that the two sets of equities can be and must be brought to harmonize. Fact is society does not consist of “workers” and “public”; the two types of which society consists are “workers” and “idlers,” or “capitalists”—with a middle class of non-descripts. The only equities that the capitalist class has are the equities of the appreciation due to its historic mission—the mission of having organized by compelling co-operative labor, hence, production in quantities equal to the demands of civilized man. That mission being fulfilled, the capitalist class now lingers superfluous on the stage of history, a harmful superfluosness. The working class is the sole class from whose standpoint all questions must be considered, and agreeable to whose standpoint all questions should be decided. Regard for the standpoint of any other element in society retards if it does not endanger, progress.

The posture of militant Socialism on Labor or Factory legislation may seem “fanatical,” as some call it; “unwise,” as others term it. Approached with a mind trained in Social Science and fortified with logical thinking, militant Socialism is merely sanity applied to the issue.

None minimizes, let alone denies the value of reform where reform brings relief. The physician who keeps his eye single on the disease, and recks not the comfort of his patient, is unfit. At the same time the physician who ignores the disease, and centers his attention upon alleviations, should be stricken from the rolls. He is a quack who will do vastly more harm than he can possibly do good. Applying these general principles to factory legislation, militant Socialism countenances, favors, encourages and supports reforms—but is cautious in its posture of favoring, encouraging and supporting.

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For one thing, on the same principle that a high fever is so very much more obvious than its diphtheritic cause, the surface manifestations of the diphtheria of Capitalist Rule strike the eye so quickly that he who has no theoretic equipment is easily taken off his feet; confuses effect for cause; and is apt to buckle down to the kind of endless task that the French proverb pictorially calls endeavoring to drink the sea dry.—That switch must be kept locked.

For a second thing, among the diphtheria microbes of the Capitalist Class not a few are quick-eyed enough to perceive the deception that appearances practice upon those who are theoretically unequipped; and the microbes are quick-witted enough to perceive the relief to themselves of having the effects of their existence, instead of their existence itself, attacked. These microbes of the Capitalist Class, accordingly, encourage the optic-social delusion by pronouncing “most important,” “absolutely necessary,” and so forth the efforts of those who sit down “to drink the sea dry.”—That switch also must be kept locked.

For a third thing, these microbes of the Capitalist Class find a further advantage to flow from the optic-social illusion referred to. It is that it offers an opportunity to debauch forces that otherwise, without disregarding the benefits of alleviatory reforms, would center their activity upon uprooting the microbes themselves. An excessive importance attached to factory legislation, accompanied with considerable tenderness for the good intentions of the above-referred-to microbes, is the consequence.—Also that switch must be kept locked.

Needless to pursue the inquiry any further. Militant Socialism knows how actively alive the diphtheric microbe of Capitalism is to turn to advantage the allurments of reform. Militant Socialism is aware of the fatal consequences of this activity to the body social. As a final consequence, the duty devolves upon militant Socialism to be quick to cauterize all expressions—the expression “the standpoint of the worker

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and the general public” is one of them—that are aidful in the policy of the diphtheritic microbe to benumb, to confuse and thus turn awry the current of Socialism and make it lose the name of action.

Respectfully,

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Welfare League.**

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