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EDITORIAL

## HOLDING OUT THE OLD LURE.

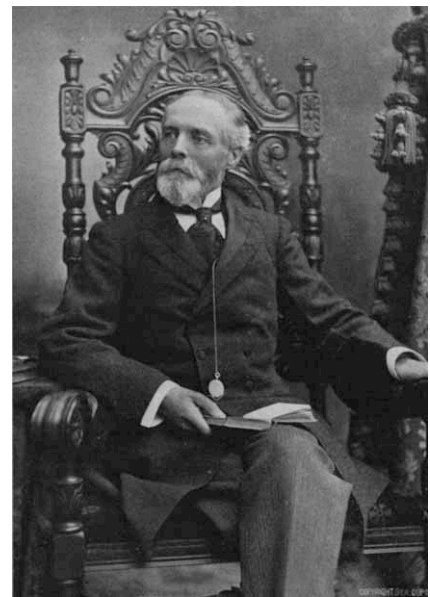
By DANIEL DE LEON

**W**HITELAW Reid has been heard from again. As usual he has been heard from in a manner that shows him to be imbued with the mental and moral dishonesty so characteristic of the defenders of capitalism. In an address delivered at the seventh anniversary of Founder's Day at the Carnegie Institution, Pittsburg, Pa., and described as "scholarly and philosophical," "bold in premise and deduction," Reid is reported to have said:

"Years ago a laboring man on strike said to me: 'There is no use any longer in talking to us about saving and rising out of our class; about ever becoming an employer and one's own master. That stage of the world has passed.'

"It is the most dangerous delusion of the times, undermining the foundations alike of industrial progress and of public honesty, and its only logical outcome is either a permanent and unrepudiated fixity of classes or the hopeless Dead Sea of socialism.

"The same declaration about the impossibility of rising under existing conditions was heard in New York when a young boatman named Cornelius Vanderbilt was beginning to run a little ferry to Staten Island. It was heard in my own calling when Bennett and Greeley and Raymond started, and heard again when they died. But after Vanderbilt came Scott and Cassatt, Huntington, Morgan, Hill and Harriman. The development of the newspapers did not stop with Bennett and Greeley and Raymond, and Schwab is not the last day laborer to rise from the iron mills. The chances for the young man are and must be kept as good to-day as they ever were."



WHITELAW REID (1837-1912)

The dishonesty of this passage consists in attributing to Socialism a denial of the fact that it is possible for individual workingmen to become Vanderbilts, Scotts,

Cassatts, etc., etc., and in further insinuating that because it is possible for individual workingmen to do this it is therefore possible for the entire working class to do it also. Socialism rather affirms the fact that it is possible for an individual workingman to so rise; but it denies the insinuation. It points out that the function of classes in capitalism makes it impossible for the entire working class to become Vanderbilts. Were all the members of the working class to become Vanderbilts, Scotts, Cassatts, etc., etc., who would perform the labor of producing and distributing? Who would be the working class whose exploitation makes the Vanderbilts, et al., possible? The answer is obvious. It shows that it is only possible for only a few, and a very limited few, of the working class to rise under capitalist conditions to become Vanderbilts, Scotts, Cassatts, etc., etc., or their "own," that is, working class masters; and it shows, incidentally, the dishonesty of the Reid quotation.

Now, Socialism not only insists that the functions of classes make it impossible for the entire working class to become Vanderbilts, Scotts, Cassatts, etc., etc., etc., but it further insists that the time when the larger percentage of workingmen could by means of small capital enter into manufacture, business and farming and become their own masters, as in the early days of the republic, are passing away never to return. And against the mere Reidian assertion to the contrary, it offers figures and facts.

In 1890, for instance, it was shown by the census figures that the great capitalist class to which the Vanderbilts, Scotts, Cassatts, etc., etc., belong numbered  $1\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. of the population, with 65 per cent. of the wealth of the country to their credit; while the great working class numbered 55 per cent. of the population, with but 4 per cent. of the country's wealth to their account. In the early days of the republic no such economic contrasts existed. Since 1890, this contrast has most likely increased in percentage. In farming, for instance, there has been a steady increase in the number of tenantry, a system of agricultural production somewhat analogous to mechanical production, in that the farm lands, stocks, and implements are owned by the farm owners and are operated on shares or rentals by the tenants occupying and using them. In New York State, for instance, there were, in 1900, 28,669 fewer owners of farms than in 1880, and 14,331 tenants. Something more than every third farm in the United States is now a tenant farm, the proportion for the nation being 35.3 per cent. Thus in farming, where

thrift, saving and ambition are not unknown, where, in fewer words, the characteristics of the republic which Reid lauds are most exhibited, there also are the chances for the young men of to-day to become Vanderbilts, Scotts, Cassatts, etc., etc., growing beautifully less. And so it has increased in every branch of capitalist life since 1890.

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