

EDITORIAL

THE HATTERS STRIKE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

A LARGE number of hatters, variously estimated at from 18,000 to 24,000 are reported on strike.

What is it all about?

The National Fur Felt Hat Manufacturers Association declares that the Hatters' Union has violated its contract. The Hatters Union declares with equal emphasis that the Manufacturers' Association has violated its contract.

In sight of such diametrically conflicting statements, elemental principles of the law of evidence would point to the conclusion that some one is lying. The conclusion is unjustified. This is an instance in which other facts must be considered besides the ones alleged by contestants. The fact to be here considered, and without consideration of which the present hatters turmoil remains chaotic, is this:—A "contract" between contracting parties that are not peers is no contract at all.

Manufacturers and employes are not peers. The former is master; the latter slave. Agreements entered between such incompatible elements lack the fundamental solidity to draw any safe conclusions from. Each will necessarily interpret the agreement from his standpoint. The two standpoints being at war with each other, they afford no common starting ground. In the absence of a common starting ground, all conclusions are false.

Are there, then, no conclusions at all drawable? Yes, indeed.

The conclusion to be drawn is—Contracts entered between Employer and Employe are tanglefoots. Being such, they are null, void and of no effect, as regulators. On the contrary, they are sources of increased confusion. Consequently, foremost on the list of its regulations, the Union should adopt a list headed "DON'T." And, topmost among the "don'ts," this command: "Don't Contract."

The "Contract" tanglefoot once eliminated there will be less stumbling and

falling; and Labor, steady on its feet, will be able to see what to-day it is prevented from seeing. The dust raised by the tumblings through the tanglefoot of “Contracts” goes far to prevent Labor from perceiving the path of solidarity.

The “Contract” is a lure and a deception. The individual Union imagines it can gain something thereby. So imagining, it imagines it obtains at least a mess of potage for its birthright. What it obtains in fact is a dish of pebbles—ungrindable, uneatable, undigestible. Seeing the mess of potage turns out an absolute swindle, a Union that contracts, gets not even a mess of potage for its pains.

The Hatters’ strike, which leaves other and even kindred industries “contracted” at work—plainly speaking, scabbing upon the strikers—is one of the numerous repeating events that loudly cry out to Labor:—

“Don’t Contract!” in other words, “Unite!

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

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