

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 10, NO. 291.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, APRIL 17, 1910.

TWO CENTS.

EDITORIAL

“RECOUPING.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

IT was Goldwin Smith, the “philosopher, economist and publicist,” who—from his comfortable retreat near Toronto where he enjoys a cushioned seat on the top of the social wagon to which the toiling masses are harnessed and at which they toilsomely tug—complacently dismissed the theory of higher prices hurting anybody. Goldwin Smith argued that those who have to pay higher prices for what they buy can recoup themselves by demanding higher prices for what they sell.

Labor has taken the tip. A veritable epidemic of strikes has broken out. Railroad workers, paper makers, tin and sheet iron workers, miners both of coal and minerals, house builders, and so on, here and there, and everywhere are grumbling, and the grumbling grows to a rumbling, and the rumbling materializes into strikes, or threatening of strikes, of various dimensions. At bottom of it all is the rise in prices. With the risen prices the purchasing power of the wages received has proportionally decreased. Is Labor trying to “recoup” itself? Probably that is what Labor means. The fact is that Labor has started to and is driven into gathering some fresh and useful experience. That experience is that a chasm divides the property-holding class from the propertyless or working class; and that the chasm is of such a nature as to render the “recouping” process, efficient enough among property-holders, so inefficient in the hands of the proletariat, as to open its eyes to the formerly unseen chasm, and thereby compel it to resort to something more drastic than “recouping.”

When the landlord raises his price to his tenant the baker, the baker can immediately recoup himself by raising his price to the shoe manufacturer; whereupon the shoe manufacturer can forthwith recoup himself by raising his price to his retail customer; whereupon the retail shoe storekeeper can instanter recoup himself by raising his price to his grocery patron, and so all along the line; and all

these “recoupers” can recoup” themselves from the workingman. So soon as the “recouping” process strikes that “merchant,” the workingman or seller of the merchandise labor-power, the process virtually comes to an end. From that point on “recouping” is transformed. It becomes “revolution,” or the orchestral overture to “revolution.” The reason is that the instant the “recouping” process strikes the working class the line is drawn, and deep yawns to sight the chasm that divides the working class from the Capitalist Class—the latter standing on the “recouping” bank the other on the opposite bank, the bank of “revolution.”

“Recouping” is an individual act; no organization is needed for the move; it awakens no class sense. Where something like “recouping” becomes imperative, and, soon as started, imperatively demands organization, then the process forthwith awakens the class sense. This is the case with the “recouping” by Labor.

It matters not how blindly groping Labor may move at first, or how strenuously the labor lieutenants of the Capitalist class may seek to keep the blinkers on Labor in order to prevent it from perceiving the class-chasm—all that matters not, at least for permanent results. The identical latent law that forces the Capitalist Class to reveal the class-chasm, also forces the sight of the chasm, and, with the sight, its meaning upon the Working Class. Goldwin Smith suggested more than the “philosopher, economist and publicist” bargained for.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded April 2011

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