

EDITORIAL

QUINTESSSENCE OF LAWSONISM.

By DANIEL DE LEON

IT was providential dispensation that drove Thomas W. Lawson to write a letter to the New York *Times* in answer to some criticisms offered by that paper to some of Lawson's statements; and it was an additionally providential dispensation that induced Lawson to pay the *Times* to publish his answer.

Mr. Lawson had said:

"There can be no just complaint against an 80 per cent. cut in dividends to meet labor's absolutely necessary demands. Labor's increase cannot come from any source other than interest and dividends now paid upon the Nation's securities."

To this statement the *Times* objected with an alleged economic principle, to wit, "It is well known that wages must be paid before dividends can be earned."

Here was issue joined.

On the one side stood Lawson, with language thrilling enough to catch Labor's heart: "Labor's demands are absolutely necessary"; the increased wages "cannot come from any source other than dividends and interest"; hence an "80 per cent. cut in dividends" is a process that "there can be no just complaint against."

The *Times's* answer, if sound, knocks the bottom from under Lawson's statement. If, indeed, the economic principle is sound to the effect that dividends can not be earned before wages are paid, then it becomes a mathematically physical impossibility to raise wages, the previous expense, out of dividends, the subsequent event, and Lawson's proposition is a crazy man's chimera.

Fact is the Lawson's proposition is not a crazy man's chimera; it is sound reasoning from correct premises; whereas the *Times's* answer is word-jugglery intended to deceive them who know less than itself.

How does Lawson comport himself in face of the *Times's* virtual challenge to his sanity?

Does Lawson take the matter from bottom up? Does he first demonstrate that dividends are wealth? Does he then demonstrate that not a particle of wealth is producible by Idleness, but must be produced by Labor, at least as a starter? Does he then take up a third line of demonstration, to wit, that dividends-drawing stockholders and interest-receiving money lenders are of the Idle or Capitalist class? And does he then, combining the three lines of reasoning, convict the *Times* of itself being advancer of a crazy man's chimera, to wit, the theory that wealth, the result of Labor, is the preponderator of Labor—the child the preponderator of its father?

Does Lawson stick a pin there and finish up the *Times* by thrusting down the throat of the Dummy Director's organ the word-jugglery whereby the attempt is made of concealing the fact that the wages that are paid are paid out of the store of wealth previously produced by, but withheld from Labor through the capitalist tentacles variously called "profits," "interest," "rent," "dividends" and what not?

Does Lawson do that, and walk with the *Times's* scalp dangling from his belt? Not at all. That sort of argument is dangerous to Lawsonian purposes, which contemplate anything but the fixing of the economic principles to light the path of Labor to its emancipation.

What, then, does Lawson do? Does he run away? Not at all. To run away would defeat the Lawsonian sole purposes, to wit, to make his pile by scaring {the} bond-and-stock holding fraternity, with exasperating hints at Socialist economics, and, then, with that as a basis, to frighten the fraternity with "talks out of school." Accordingly, when the *Times* snarled its criticism at Lawson, the gentleman gave the same the go-by, but answered with a detailed account of how Chicago, Burlington & Quincy stock was at one time selling below \$100; how the trustees of a certain Railroad Company bought the said stock at \$100; how these railroad trustees, in their capacity of trustees, gave \$200 of bonds for each \$100 share of stock; how these bonds were then sold back at \$200 to the insurance companies from whom the stock was originally bought; and how, by the transaction, individually made 100 per cent. profit;—certainly a piece of railroad chicanery, exposure of which must have sent a cold chill down the backs of many "railroad interests," the back of the *Times* included—with obvious and advantageous financial consequences to Lawson.

The profundity of the swindle perpetrated by the railroad trustees in question

does not affect the proletarians in the slightest. The swindle took not one copper out of their pockets; it was a case of swine rend{ing} swine, Labor figuring on neither side. The 100 per cent. stolen by the railroad were, of course, wealth that Labor produced; but it was that portion of its product that Labor never pocketed, the same being sponged up from Labor in the shop in the shape of “profits.” So far as Labor is concerned, the stoppage of such financial sleights of hand, as the referred-to railroad trustees indulged in, will improve matters not in the slightest; but the revelation of such transactions, with specifications enough to earn credence for the revelations, and to arouse, in certain quarters, fears lest the specifications grow more specific—that will benefit Lawsonism, and that is Lawsonism and its quintessence.

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