

Editorial: A Fool or a Knave

An anonymous article in this month's *Forum* on "Municipal Reform" lays down the maxim that the cause of political corruption is the poverty of the office-holder, and that to insure political purity, none but property-holders should be elected.

The anonymous writer of that maxim either lives in a fool's paradise, or says a good deal less than he means.

In 999 cases out of every 1,000, the property-holding class is the one most exposed to the strongest temptations; it is the least reliable; it has proved itself the most venal. And this stands to reason.

The bulk of the property-holding class is of the class of the small producers; it stands between the devil and the deep blue sea; it is caught between two mill-stones, that are grinding it down to dust with the irresistibility of doom. The upper is the class of the large property-holders or large producers; the lower is Organized Labor. The former are steadily introducing improved methods of production, through machinery and concentration of capital, the effect of all of which is to lower the cost of production and the price of commodities; the small holder and producer cannot keep step with this development; he must compete with the large producer, but is unable to reduce the cost of production in his establishment down to the level of the large producer, because he lacks the means wherewith to acquire improved machinery; driven by the large producer, he falls upon his employes: unable to reduce the cost of production through increased capital, he tries to do so thorough decreased wages; but there he falls foul of Organized

Daniel De Leon

Labor; his workmen strike; fain would he bulldoze them, but he finds that the means to this end, constantly resorted to by the big capitalists—the aid of the Government—is not available to him; the large capitalist controls the Government as he does machinery; the small fellow who has no funds to purchase large machinery, likewise lacks the “pull” to bring the Government down over the ears of rebellious workingmen and coerce them with clubs, militias and indictments into submission as the big capitalist regularly does; and as a rule, he can make little headway against his hands. Thus driven from behind by the large capitalist and resisted in front by Organized Labor, the small capitalist begins to scheme schemes more or less criminal to acquire cash, save his credit, and keep his head above water. Fraud is his favorite recourse, and, as a result, untold numbers of this class land in the penitentiary where, in proportion to their numbers, they greatly exceed the convicts from any other class. Indeed, a glance at our Legislatures will reveal the fact that the most impure of all office-holders are the small property men. If the anonymous writer of the *Forum* article is not aware of this fact, if he really hugs the general delusion that there is help in the middle, small property-holding class, if he does not perceive the havoc which the economic evolution is playing among this gentry, he is living in a fool’s paradise.

But there is no reason to believe that the anonymous writer does not know any better. If he does, however, he has said a good deal less than he means, and his article is only intended as the thin edge of a broad plan, a plan that contemplates nothing less than the ultimate placing of both the suffrage and the offices in the hands of the big capitalists, the monopolists, and establishing an oligarchy here. Many, and various, and insidious have been the moves in this direction. That such a plan is to-day quite soberly contemplated by not a few is certain; the article in question is more than likely a feeler in that direction.

At any rate we may be sure there skulks behind the namelessness of the article either a fool or a knave; either a

A Fool or a Knave

feather-brained economist, or a schemer against political freedom.

The People, Vol. II, No. 51. Sunday, March 19, 1893

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*A De Leon editorial transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the
Official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.*

Uploaded August 2002