

# DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 3, NO. 142.

NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 1902.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

## “THE PUBLIC.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

WAYNE MACVEAGH—“Do you consider it none of your business what additional cost THE PUBLIC will have to pay for their coal, if that additional cost is the immediate result of your demands?”

JOHN MITCHELL—“I have stated that it was beyond our control; that we have absolutely nothing to do with the selling price of coal.”

—Examination at Scranton, Nov. 17.

**W**HAT is “the public”? Who is “the public”? From the above use of the term one would imagine that it is a well defined idea. No doubt such is the meaning intended to be conveyed by the term in the mouth of the attorney for the coal corporations; and no doubt also such is the sense in which the “labor representative” took it. But is it? Let’s see.

Even a preliminary closer inspection will bring out a certain fact that materially batters the meaning applied to “the public.” Obviously, the miners would have “no kick coming” that the price of coal has risen, if the price of their own merchandise, labor power, their wages, kept step with such rise. At any rate, they would not be sufferers from such “additional cost of production.” This substantive fact points straight to the correct definition of “the public,” a definition that shatters the vast superstructure of deceit—actual and applied—which the capitalist class, jointly with its “labor lieutenants,” has reared behind which it chicanes the workingman; a definition that, like all scientific definition, is eminently constructive in that it reveals both the untenableness of capitalism, and the way out of this “foretaste of hell.”

What is “the public”? Is it a hard and fast entity? No; “the public” is a shifting entity. It has as many different aspects as it happens at any one time to be facing a different industry of the scores and hundreds of industries.

“The public,” with regard to the coal industry, is the whole people,—minus the

miners.

"The public," with regard to the baking industry, is the whole people, miners included,—but minus the bakers.

"The public," with regard to the textile industry, is the whole people, miners and bakers included,—but minus the weavers.

"The public," with regard to the shoe industry, is the whole people, miners, bakers and weavers included,—but minus the shoeworkers.

And so on, through the whole gamut of industries.

"The public," in any one instance, means the consumers of the product of that particular industry,—TO THE UTTER EXCLUSION OF THE PRODUCERS THEREOF.

And what means "the public," what does the term practically stand for, not in one instance, but in all?

The above partial definition, joined to other correlated facts, gives the complete definition. The correlated facts are:

1. The idle Capitalist Class is a consumer, pre-eminently a consumer, exclusively a consumer,—and no sardine consumer, at that;
2. The toiling Working Class is also a consumer, but not exclusively a consumer. It has two sides: the consumer's side (the side interested in cheapness) and the producer's side (the side interested in dearness).

Accordingly, "the public" stands for the consumer's side of the nation—TO THE UTTER EXCLUSION OF, NAY, AT THE EXPENSE OF LABOR.

A tell-tale definition!

It tells the tale:

1. That the capitalist, and the capitalist alone, can consistently consider "the public." He does not "seek to benefit" only the bakers, weavers, shoeworkers, etc., by "reducing the cost of mining." He also "seeks to benefit" the miners; and in order to do so, must "reduce the cost of production" in the baking, weaving, shoemaking and all other industries with regard to which the miner is a factor in "the public." In other words, by considering "the public"—of which the capitalist, being a non-producer and idler, always is a factor—the capitalist pursues his own class interests. These class interests are irreconcilably opposed to Labor. To consider "the public" in the matter of the cost of

production inevitably means to resist the rise of wages, to lower them whenever possible, and as fast as he can.

2. That, if not corruption, then only ignorance—such crass ignorance as would unfit a man for leadership in a Trades Union—can cause a Union officer to consider “the public” in the matter of the “cost of production.” Under capitalism the idea is tantamount to declining wages. To demand an increase and at the same time fondle “the public” is to place Labor in the undignified attitude of sticking its foot in its own mouth.

3. That under capitalism no advantage can really accrue to any section of the Working Class except at the expense of other sections: Raise wages in the one, and the consumer’s side of the rest of the Working Class suffers. Cater to the consumer’s side of one part of the Working Class, and other parts must pine under “reduced cost of production.”

4. That the Labor Movement is one and indivisible. So long as the Working Class has not recognized its solidarity, so long as any one branch can seek its own particular benefit—just so long will it be a dislocated body, the victim to “the public” and other capitalist juggling phrases, a curse to itself, a curse to mankind.

5. In the passage at arms between MacVeagh and Mitchell, quoted at the head of this column, the latter dodged, and the dodge was equivalent to a surrender of the Cause of Labor. The Cause of Labor demands the cauterizing of the deception that underlies the modern term, “The Public.” The Cause of Labor demands that the “cost of production,” Labor’s share, be the highest attainable, and not a fraction below its full product.

With Capitalism “The Public” is a devouring monster.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.  
Uploaded October 2006