

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 10, NO. 236.

NEW YORK, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 1910.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

A BUBBLE WELL PRICKED.

By DANIEL DE LEON

AMONG the many forces and bodies working in this city for less crowded conditions of living is the Committee on Congestion of Population in New York. The Committee is only one of surely a dozen similar organizations. The movement is widespread.

Time was when such a movement would have been looked up to in admiration as an evidence of “philanthropy” and “the world is getting better.” Into this bubble of mind-beclouding sentimentality the Committee itself is at great pains to stick the much-needed pin. In its bulletin just issued on “Why the Manufacturer Wants to Prevent Congestion of Population” the Committee quotes this statement “from a conservative organization, The Merchants’ Association of New York”:

“From the point of view of this Association any schemes that would increase the facilities of rapid transit and distribution of freight and increase the power of production through MORE EFFICIENT LABOR and LOWER RENTALS, with all of the incidental benefits that would accrue therefrom, are, FROM A PRACTICAL BUSINESS STANDPOINT, highly desirable.”

That is a good stiff pin; but even the stiffest of pins may wobble unless well driven home. The Committee proceeds to drive its pin home, as follows:

“A prominent English manufacturer, W.H. Lever, at Port Sunlight, near Liverpool, writes that he builds cottages and provides gardens for his workers at only one per cent. profit because it PAYS him to do so from a STRICTLY COMMERCIAL POINT OF VIEW, that is—A HEALTHY WORKER CAN WORK BETTER AND THAT MEANS LARGER PROFITS.”

But even if selfish, is not this movement for better housing of the workers a sign of progress? it may be asked. Just the reverse. Formerly the employer cared not

a whit about the conditions his working people lived under. He did not have to. He used them up as fast as they came, squeezed them dry, and flung them aside—knowing there were plenty more, bounding with health and strength, waiting to take their places. Now, however, having used up all the fresh blood, having by generations of exploitation exhausted all their energy and produced a sapped and devitalized stock, he finds that he must first build up and carefully conserve their labor power before he can make use of it. That is the secret of the anti-congestion movement insofar as it concerns the manufacturer, and it is a secret which spells anything but progress for the workers—it spells declining well-being.

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Uploaded February 2011

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