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EDITORIAL

LO, THE POOR INVENTOR!

By DANIEL DE LEON

WHENEVER the position of a defender of capitalism against the attacks of Socialism becomes desperate, he drags forth the inventor. "What are you going to do with the inventor, the man whose genius has created the great machines which make wealth and civilization possible? Are you going to despoil him—to rob him?"

To this the Socialist generally retorts by showing that it is capitalism that robs the inventor, and he proves his case by indisputable evidence culled from court records. But times are changing, so much so, that it may be said that the individual inventor has become as much of a myth as the individual captain of industry—the great Overman who, it is alleged, directs the works of thousands of wage slaves. To-day industry is so ramified, so colossal, that it is an impossibility for one man to direct it. Corps of trained subordinates, executive, engineering, and other boards, meet in frequent consultation to devise ways and means for the safe conduct of the consolidated industries over which they preside; so much so, that when the great Overman goes off to Monte Carlo on a carouse, industry continues as though he never breathed. And so, it is with the inventor. Invention has become social in scope and methods. With the various branches of industry so closely related, the mechanical changes in one branch of production must be considered in their relation to other branches. The result is that to-day, the inventor is no longer an isolated being, developing himself and his ideas in some dismal garret. The inventor is to-day the product of a scientific school or a great establishment, which, while specializing his abilities, has given him a well-rounded education. The inventor is to-day a part of a corps of technical experts, men rarely heard of outside their own spheres, who, with the finest mechanical equipments and extensive chemical laboratories at their command, work in co-operative unison for the production of

new and interrelated inventions, and the improvement of old ones. The inventor to-day is one of the multitude of workingmen who are asked to drop suggestions for improvements in boxes placed about the factories in which they work; suggestions that have, in the aggregate, produced a new type of machines and so transformed the original inventions as to make them entirely new creations; suggestions that have immensely enriched the capitalists to whom they were given, while the reward of the workingmen making them was a few paltry prizes, which are far from being commensurate in value with the things they are supposed to represent.

The poor lone inventor whom Socialism would rob (sic), is a myth, and, like all myths, is adorned with the poetry of by-gone ages. Like modern industry, modern invention is social. And since the social character of industry demands the social ownership of the means of production and distribution forming its basis, so does the social nature of invention demand the social ownership of its creations.

Lo, the poor inventor!—as a capitalist shield he is played out!

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