

EDITORIAL

WHAT OF THE CHILDREN?

By DANIEL DE LEON

WHAT of the children? is a question to which various nations, each at its own time, has given its own answer. The worshippers of Moloch used them as food for an idol; the Athenians by the sports of the gymnasium and palaestra, trained them to the maximum of beauty, strength, and intellectuality. The enlightenment of a nation may in great measure be judged by the care it takes of its children.

How, judged by that standard, fares modern capitalist America? A little consideration will show that it ranks below the detested Moloch worshippers. They but killed individual children. Those that were left remained hale and vigorous; those that perished perished quickly and without wanton torture. The modern capitalist begins to kill the child before it is born, by the malnutrition and overwork of its parents, and even, perhaps, by forcing the mother to work at a factory sewing machine or a mill loom 12 hours per day. No sooner is the child born than capitalism, in the guise of impoverished food, impure air and cramped quarters, begins the deadly work on it, in its own person. If the child lives to grow up, it may never be allowed to see the inside of a school room. If it escapes this degradation, it goes to school for a short period, usually in such physical condition that it is unable to realize the best results from its study, and is then, before it is ripe for the world, torn loose and thrown into the factory's maw, which it had only temporarily escaped. More children are every year killed by capitalism than the furnaces of Moloch ever claimed; and those that are left are robbed of the heritage of health and robustness which, among the fire-worshippers, the undestroyed infants retained.

The New York State Hospital for Deformed and Crippled Children reports for 1907 the paltry number of 68 patients treated. Of these, 22, the greatest number from any one county, come from New York County—Manhattan Island. Thirty-nine

of the total 68, or more than half, were suffering from tuberculous diseases of the joints. Tuberculous diseases, scrofula, and kindred ailments are being increasingly recognized as developing from and as being fostered by insufficient food. Is anything being done to remedy this condition?

City Superintendent of Schools Maxwell reports that more than half of the children now attending schools are suffering from physical ailments which hinder their study. "The conditions of modern city life tend to produce physical defects and disease in children," he says. Crowding in ill-lighted tenements, insufficient feeding, lack of play room are among the conditions of modern city life which he blames for this state of affairs. Is anything being done to remedy these conditions?

A few State hospitals cannot compensate for the system which leaves thousands of children disabled and handicapped in life by unfit food or surroundings. A few orphan asylums cannot compensate for the system which robs tens of thousands of father and mother. A capitalist two-times-two education, caught on the fly between cradle and sweatshop, cannot compensate for the millions who are deprived of any at all. Making every allowance possible, and considering that to-day, for the first time in human history, enough is producible to feed, clothe, and house all in comfort, capitalism still remains the most profligate of its children's lives of all the systems of society ever known.

What of the children? Capitalism says, Anything, so long as my profits flow in. Socialism alone can answer, A full and joyous life be theirs, for they are the future men and women of the nation!

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

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