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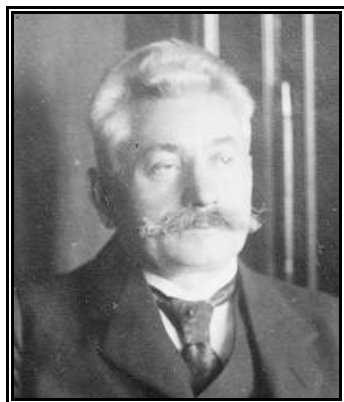
EDITORIAL

LEGIEN ON IMMIGRATION.

By DANIEL DE LEON

IN his headlong rush to shield Gompers in Berlin, Karl Legien, the national secretary of the German Unions, advanced a theory that needs looking into.

Gompers, true to his Civic Federation office, had sought to justify his labor dislocating anti-immigration policy. Legien stepped forth in support of Gompers with the statement: "In most cases it is not the best element of the working class that goes to America. The elite of the working class wage the struggle for betterment of their condition in their own country."



KARL LEGIEN (1861-1920)

There is so much seeming truth in the statement that its falsity, and thereby its harmfulness, is apt to be swallowed.

There can be no doubt that a good deal of downright trash comes to America, not infrequently is deliberately dumped upon our shores by more than one European government. In this circumstance lies an added difficulty to the Labor problem in America. We have not only refuse that our own capitalism dumps upon us, but also a goodly spray of the refuse thrown up by European capitalism. Nor yet can it be doubted that, although the bulk of these undesirables are bourgeois riff-raff—cheats, moral misfits, runaway embezzlers, folks who live by their wits, and the like,—not a few proceed also from the slum-proletarian layers of Europe. Anyone acquainted with the Volkszeitung Corporation make-up knows this. Are these crippled elements the rule? Superficially considered they are. On the same principle that one Anarchist's bomb makes a fearful racket, and thereby promotes the mistaken notion that Anarchists are numerous, one European worthlessness who comes over is apt to color the mental atmosphere to the unguarded.

It is a historic feature of Emigration that it draws upon the most desirable of a nation's population. The sluggard, submissive to evil conditions; the dull-witted, incapable of conceiving improvement possible; the uninformed, convinced that, the world over, things are exactly alike;—from these and such-like elements Emigration can draw but few, if any recruits. The stream of Emigration ever is made up on the whole of the physically and mentally alert, and that element is furnished by a country's elite. It is by elite of the East that the Western States have been built up; it is by elite of Great Britain that the colonies were established; it is from the elite of all Europe that the American Republic, once set up, had its veins filled, and its life insured.

Justly did Spain bemoan the fact that she was bled to decrepitude by the Emigration of large masses of her elite; justly did Bismarck scheme and plan and hustle to check the Emigration from Germany: he had no Gompersism to defend, and knew full well that Emigration drained the elite of the fatherland. Of course, a strong emigrational current, like a rushing river, washes along subsoil. But, as with the river, the subsoil that Emigration carries along is not its body, or bulk.

Legien was mistaken in his fact and his theory.

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

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