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EDITORIAL

TWO ADVERTISEMENTS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

TWO advertisements have recently appeared—one in the monthly magazines, the other in the daily press—that are worth more than a casual perusal, as they reflect a tendency of great sociological value and importance. The first advertisement is that of a shoe company, with factory at East Whitman, Mass. It shows that in 1891 this company had one retail store; in 1898, 30; in 1902, 45; in 1905, 102. It announces that 38 new stores are planned for 1906; also that the company intends to reach millions of people through a mail order department. The advertisement states, “—shoes are delivered, carriage prepaid, anywhere in the United States or Canada, Cuba, Porto Rico, Hawaiian and Philippine Islands; also Germany, Japan, Norway, Belgium and all points covered by the Parcels Post System, at the same price as in our 102 stores, with 25 cents extra to cover delivery charges.” The second advertisement is that of a cigar stores company. According to this advertisement, this stores company started with one store and two salesmen in New York City in October, 1901. The first day’s sale amounted to \$8.70; the first month’s sale to \$5,243.16. In October, 1905, the company had 300 and odd stores in operation in 36 cities of the United States, employing 914 salesmen. Sales for the month aggregated \$827,986.67, or at the rate of \$10,000,000 a year. The company announces that it plans to open in Greater New York during the next year or eighteen months something like 100 new stores. What its intentions are regarding other cities is not announced, but it is safe to infer that plans for their development are not wanting. This stores company is a part of the Tobacco Trust.

These two advertisements are significant in a variety of ways. They are most striking illustrations, (1) of the growing tendency to concentrate retailing by means of the chain-of-stores and mail order systems; (2) of the movement making manufacturing, or production, one with retailing, or distribution. This two-fold

tendency has a bad effect upon the middle class. It eliminates both the jobber and retailer. Not only is the small storekeeper and the country storeman affected by it, but so also is the large department store corporation, which sees in the ultimate development of the specialized chain-of-stores and the mail order houses, the cause of its dissolution. Further, this two-fold tendency, cuts down the profits and limits the opportunities of the retailing and manufacturing middle class, thus promoting sweating and proving detrimental to their increase in wealth, numbers and power.

But these two advertisements are also most striking illustrations of the immense saving of labor made possible by concentration in distribution and the unification of distribution with production. In this is the secret of the overthrow of the middle class. The shoe company declares, in another connection, that it inaugurated the chain-of-stores in order to be free of the jobber and retailer, and apply the profits that would have gone to both in meeting competition—an idea which has been proven correct by the success achieved. Turn now to the cigar stores company. It has 900 salesmen “in 300 and odd stores” (that is LESS than 3 salesmen to a store), selling \$10,000,000 worth of tobacco goods a year. In order to equal that, 900 small storekeepers in 900 small stores, aided by their wives, sons, daughters and sisters, and incidental employes would have to make sales averaging \$11,100 a year, something which the best of them cannot and do not do. As stated in the “Letter Box” of the *Daily People* yesterday, “The small salesman squanders social forces that could better be husbanded by larger and fewer shops.” While the chain of stores and mail order houses save, they waste. It is this fact that seals their doom. They may shout, “Down with the trust”, and uphold sweating in order to secure cheap goods, but the twofold tendency above described, owing to its inherent virtues, is bound to triumph. In triumphing it is hastening the growth of the conditions of massed wealth and mass oppression that make for the overthrow of Capitalism and the inauguration of Socialism.

In all of the foregoing lies the varied significance of these two advertisements.

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

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