

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 2, NO. 222.

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 1902.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

WAGES—SHARE—EARNINGS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE claims of prosperity, persistently advanced, hand in hand with the cumulating evidences of misery, and hand in hand, furthermore, with mentions of “higher wages,” are so evidently incongruous that one is inclined to ask, Are these prosperity-shouters brazen liars? Inquiry discloses the fact that they are worse than that: they are not brazen; they are cowardly; and their cowardliness lies in the way they juggle with the three words “wages,” “share” and “earnings.”

Say, a man received one year \$1 a day, and later he received \$2 a day. Up goes the shout: “wages have increased,” “prosperity!” Not necessarily. At the time of the \$1 wages the worker may have had steady work, and received the \$1 wages 300 days in the year: that would have been an earning of \$300 a year; per contra, at the time of the \$2 wages, work may have been so unsteady that he worked only 100 days, and his earnings would then be only \$200, or \$100 less than before. Wages may go up; it does not follow that earnings go up too. In fact “wages” may go up, and “earnings” go down.

Similarly as to the “share of labor.” At a time when the product of the worker is worth \$2 a day, if his wages are \$1, his share is 50 per cent. of his product. But if, as happens through perfected machinery, the product of that same worker grows to be worth \$10 a day, then even if his wages have risen to \$2 a day his share has declined: his present share would be only 20 per cent. of the product of his labor. In other words, “wages” may rise and yet the “share” of labor may tumble.

Combining these two principles it follows that the worker, who received \$1 wages at a time when the product of his labor was worth \$2 a day and when he had steady work 300 days in the year, might be infinitely worse off at a later period even if he received \$2 wages a day, if at such later period the value of his product had

increased 5 times and the unsteadiness of work left him only 100 work days. In the former case his “wages” would be \$1 but his “share” would be $\frac{1}{2}$ of his product, and his earnings \$300; while in the latter instance, despite higher wages (\$2 a day), he would be keeping only $\frac{1}{5}$ of his product, and his earnings would have shrunk to \$200.

The fact that “wages” may rise and yet the “share” of labor decline, and the worker’s “earnings” shrink{,} would be sufficient to explain the increasing volume of popular misery, and to nail the word-juggling that is going on with the words “wages,” “share” and “earnings.” But the jugglery goes further. The extent to which it goes can be measured by the increasing extent of misery. It remains to point out the system of the jugglery.

The expression “wages have risen” implies that good wages were being received before. This implication is a suggestion of a double falsehood: In most cases of a real “rise” in wages the “rise” consists either in employing men who had been thrown out of work, or in an increase above some previous cruel reduction, the “rise” leaving the “wages” below what they had been, and, accordingly{,} going hand in hand with still greater reductions of the “share” of labor, and with still greater shrinkage in earnings. In view of the fact that, in not a few instances, the alleged “rise” in wages is a pure fabrication, and in view of the further fact that, here and there, in isolated and exceptional instances, an actual rise has taken place and the news thereof is inflated out of all proportion with the facts, it follows that the present “prosperity” songs backed up by talk of higher “wages,” larger “share” and increased “earnings,” all jumbled together, is nothing but a game of Japanese jugglery, that the capitalist pulpiteers, professors, press, and politicians are seeking to humbug the people with.

Fortunately, the stomach, though a patient sufferer, has limits to its patience, and peremptory ways withal to notify the head.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded August 2006