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EDITORIAL

A WAGER WITH GOMPERS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

SAMUEL GOMPERS—President, Editor, and Undertaker and Sexton of the Civic Federationized A.F. of L.—having, in the June *American Federationist* bestowed the pontifical blessing of his name upon an article which repudiates the Marxian law of “Surplus Value”; having, accordingly, placed himself on record as rejecting the Socialist contention to the effect that the status of labor-power in capitalist society is the status of “goods, wares and merchandise,” the *Daily People* now offers the aforementioned Gompers the following wager:

The *Daily People* agrees to pay into the hands of the said Gompers one \$100-bill for every instance that the *Daily People* may fall short of twenty to furnish, duly authenticated and in one bunch, passages taken from official documents issued since 1886 over the signature of the said Gompers, or taken from official reports of A.F. of L. conventions and from the columns of the public press in which the said Gompers is reported, and all such passages containing the expression “labor market”;—provided the said Gompers, in turn, agrees to pay into the hands of the National Secretary of the Socialist Labor Party, at S.L.P. Headquarters, 28 City Hall Place, New York, one \$50-bill for each instance, over and above the twenty aforementioned, in which the *Daily People* may furnish passages from the sources aforestated containing the aforestated expression “labor-market.”

The status of labor power, under capitalism is that of “goods, wares, and merchandise,” a commodity, in short. In this, as in so many other instance’s, philology is an aid to the understanding of economics and sociology.

Before a word, especially before a noun springs up, the thing it designates must be there, tangible to feeling, or to sense. This fact is of prime importance to the tracing of the history of the human race. There is no such word as the “banker market”: the term would be unintelligible: it would be so because the thing which

gives birth to all terms does not exist. In this instance: the thing necessary to give birth to the term “banker market,” is the commodity banker: bankers not being commodities neither can there be such a term. There is no such term as the “railroad-director market”: that term also would be unintelligible: it would be so because the thing which gives birth to all terms does not exist in this instance: the thing, necessary to give birth to the term “railroad-director market” is the commodity railroad-director; railroad-directors not being commodities neither is the term known. And so forth. But there is a certain well known word—a word found in most works on economics, a word that is rarely absent from any discussion on prices, a word that hardly an issue of any paper of importance does not contain, a word with which many an A.F. of L. document and Gompers utterance fairly bristles with, a word known to and understood by all—that word is “labor market.” Seeing that the word exists, and is in such general use, the thing, whose existence is a prerequisite for the birth of the word itself, must be there. The thing necessary for the birth of the word “cattle market” exists, to wit, the commodity cattle; the thing necessary for the birth of the word “woolen market” exists, to wit, the commodity woolens; hence we have a “cattle market,” a “woolen market,” “leather market,” a “money market,” a “coffee market,” once we had a “chattel slave market,” and we have a “labor market”—proof positive that labor power is a commodity.

Labor-power being a commodity it must have the economic attributes of commodities. One of the two economic attributes of all commodities is their “use-value”: their virtue. The “use-value” of cattle is to furnish meat food, etc.; the “use-value” of woolen goods is to impart warmth; the “use-value” of leather is to furnish feet protectors, etc.; the “use-value” of money is to serve as a medium of exchange; the “use-value” of coffee is to promote heart disease to furnish physicians with fees;—the “use-value” of the labor-power is to yield an amount of wealth larger than the amount that it is bought for, a use-value without which the capitalist would not pay a copper for labor-power.

The “use value,” or virtue, of the commodity labor-power being that of sweating a larger quantity of wealth than its own value or price, it follows that labor-power yields a surplus value.

Finally, seeing that the surplus value neither falls to the lot of Labor, nor yet

ascends to heaven to feed, clothe or otherwise comfort the angels, but drops plump into the pockets of the purchaser of the commodity from which it oozed, the capitalist class, it follows as night follows day,—

1st. That he who says “labor market” implies that labor-power is a commodity;

2nd. That the use the capitalist has for the commodity is its virtue of yielding surplus value; and

3rd. That the Marxian law of Surplus Value can be denied, by him who says “labor market,” only at the risk of the acrobat’s planting his foot squarely into his own mouth.

Now, then, Samuel Gompers, President, Editor, and Undertaker and Sexton, take up the wager.

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