DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 12, NO. 246. NEW YORK, SATURDAY, MARCH 2, 1912. ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

LABOR-POWER, AGAIN.

By DANIEL DE LEON

IT was shown in a previous issue that, in the molding of the price of labor-power in the labor market, there enters a factor which does not enter in the molding of the price of any other merchandise. That factor was shown to be the circumstance that, differently from all other merchandise, the increased supply of which in the normal market is a CONSEQUENCE of the decreased value, with the merchandise labor-power the increase of its supply is the CAUSE of the ultimate decline in its value, understanding by the "value" of labor-power the workingman's standard of living at a given time.

Intimately connected with that factor is another of kindred significance.

The increased supply of a merchandise, it has been shown, is not, in a normal market, the cause of the merchandise's decline in price. In the normal market, it has been shown, the cause of a merchandise's decline in price is its decline in value. But the market is not always normal. At frequent intervals the market is abnormal, due mainly to a perturbation of the equilibrium between supply and demand. The consequence then is:

Either, that the supply exceeds the demand, in which case price will fall below value;

Or, that the demand exceeds the supply, in which case price will rise above value.

From this state of things there flow, in turn, two obvious conclusions:—

First.—It is in the interest of the seller of a merchandise that he keep the output (supply) down;

Secondly.—It is in the power of the seller to do the trick, and he does it.

This is so with regard to all sellers but—one the seller of the merchandise labor-power. He (the workingman), and he alone, can not limit the output of his merchandise labor-power. What is worse, only in his instance does the power to affect the supply of the seller's merchandise lie, not with the seller, but with the purchaser.

The coal mine baron, for instance, can control the output of his coal. The lower the supply the better off is he, because the larger the price that he realizes. For parity of reasoning the purchaser of coal desires a large supply: the larger the supply all the cheaper the coal would be. Between the purchaser and the seller of coal there is a conflict of interests. If the purchaser had it in his power the seller would be the loser. But the purchaser of coal can in no way affect the supply; that is entirely in the hands of the seller. It is so with all other commodities and sellers of commodities—the workingman and his merchandise labor-power alone excepted.

In the framework of capitalist society the workingman, being a seller, has an interest to keep down the supply of his merchandise labor-power. The power to do so, however, does not lie with him; it lies with the capitalist, and with the capitalist also lies the power to raise the supply. That which would happen to the coal mine owner, if purchasers of coal had it in their power to increase his output—ruin—is exactly what happens to the working class in the presence of the class that purchases labor-power—a lower standard of living. In the framework of capitalism Labor is the only seller whose goods the purchaser can and does render a drug upon the market. That is done through concentration of capital and improved machinery—both of them labor-displacers.

Again, we say—theory is a weariness to the soul, unless practically applied. The practical application of this feature of the merchandise labor, coupled with the others mentioned before, is war, unrelenting war upon the Gompers-Mitchell-Stone-Civic-Federationized and Militia-of-Christized style of labor DIS-Unionism, whose only result is to keep Labor shackled to the chains that gall Labor in a manner that no other seller is galled;—war, unrelenting war, upon all individuals who countenance such DIS-Unionism; last, not least, that the only Unionism deserving of the name is that which, by uniting the workingmen upon the political as well as the industrial field, drills the Working Class to cast off such shackles.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded March 2013

slpns@slp.org