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EDITORIAL

“WAGES”—AN ECHO OF “WAGES, MARRIAGE AND THE CHURCH”.

By DANIEL DE LEON

Daily and *Weekly People*:

I request space in *The People* for explanatory note and correction on the above polemic.¹

I confess that I made an error and departed from the method I started out with, when I made the statement: “a mere pittance called wages.”

However, I am neither a professional speaker nor a professional writer, and I hope the readers of *The People, Daily and Weekly*, will excuse the error. I had noticed the error after I mailed my manuscript and before it was published, but thought I was then too late to make correction.

That portion of the article should have read thus: The value of a commodity is its cost of production in socially necessary human labor. Labor-power is a commodity, and therefore its value in exchange, its price, e.g., “wages”, is its cost of production in socially necessary human labor, which means to the laborer, i.e., the vendor of labor-power, his meals, a bed to lie on, his clothing, a shack to shelter him and propagation of his species, in short, the reproduction of his labor-power.

Otherwise, my part of the controversy is substantially my interpretation (synthetic) of Marx, and I hope it contains more synthetic reasoning than does the editor of *The People*’s reply to L.K., Brooklyn, N.Y., in Letter Box of same issue of *Weekly*.

Yours, etc., etc., in anticipation of insertion,

David M. Halliday.

Roslyn, Wash., May 11, 1905.

Mr. Halliday will have to make more corrections than simply to eliminate the term “pittance” from his definition.

The gentleman’s contention was that it is incorrect to say “wages are the price of Labor”; and his argument, claiming Marxism for his argument, was that the

¹ [See “Wages’—An Echo of Wages, Marriage and the Church.” *Daily People*, April 26, 1905.—R.B.]

laborer is robbed of ALL that he produces. As we showed before, such a statement involves a double contradiction: If, as Mr. Halliday expressly stated, the laborer sells his labor-power, it is contradictory to claim that he gets nothing for it; the laborer would be a curiosity of a merchant who admittedly SELLS and yet gets NOTHING. The second contradiction lay in claiming that such a conclusion is Marxist, and the contradiction was all the more glaring seeing that it came right upon the heels of a Marxian quotation taken from the chapter in which Marx elaborates the point of the exchange-value of the merchandise labor-power, which the laborer sells: the act of selling implies to receive something. The gentleman’s use of the term “pittance” for wages simply illustrated the barrenness of his premises. If the laborer gets NOTHING for his labor-power, and what is flung at him is a PITTANCE, the law is shattered that governs and underlies the size of the pittance. That law, however, is important to ascertain. Marx ascertained it. It is the law of the exchange-value of all commodities; and labor-power being a commodity, the law that determines the normal size of its price is the law of its exchange-value.

But now, in making his partial correction, Mr. Halliday slips into a fresh error, an error of first magnitude. As appears from his own words, value in exchange and price are synonymous {synonymous?}.

We stated above that, labor-power being a commodity, the law that determines the NORMAL size of its price is the law of its exchange-value. There is, however, hardly a time when a commodity actually sells at its exchange-value, or, to put it in other words, when its price and its exchange value coincide. The actual price that commodities fetch in the world’s market is only exceptionally normal, that is, identical with their exchange-value. The thousand and one perturbing causes of the market disturb the coincidence of “price” and “exchange-value.” It is owing to this circumstance that the vulgar capitalist mind denies the existence of the exchange-value of merchandise, and the soundness of the Marxian law of exchange-value; and one of the most brilliant achievements of Marx’s genius is his confutation of their contention, whereby he establishes the difference between “price”—that which a merchandise fetches in the market, as the upshot of the perturbing influences that operate upon its exchange-value; and “exchange-value”—the central measure that is determined by the amount of labor-power crystalized in and socially necessary for

its reproduction. Like all other merchandise, labor-power is affected by perturbing causes in the labor-market; and these perturbing cause{s} affect its price (the wages that the laborer receives), occasionally, however rarely, sending the price up above, but generally pressing it down below the exchange-value of labor-power. To speak of the “value in exchange” and the “price” of labor-power as one thing is a grave error: the error is theoretic, and it becomes fatal in practice: it destroys the principle of exchange-value in labor-power: it beclouds the pregnant social fact of the causes that disable the laborer from obtaining even the exchange-value of his merchandise—which merchandise, as we showed in the previous answer to Mr. Halliday, comes down in the last analysis to himself—it is his own hide that he takes to market for a tanning.

It is to be hoped, in case Mr. Halliday should care to continue this discussion, that he will drop the controversial tone of injecting the personal equation into the argument—a feature that marked his previous, and of which even this last communication is not free. Autobiographic snatches, and snatches of alleged or insinuated biography of the person opposed to, nobody cares for; everybody cares for the subject-matter of the discussion—that is the important, and only thing of interest.

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

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