

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 8, NO. 161.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8, 1907.

TWO CENTS.

EDITORIAL

THE MEASURE OF REWARD.

By DANIEL DE LEON

ANORFOLK, VA., correspondent writes to this office that Prof. Mattox of the school of Norfolk County is worried on the score of the standing of teachers in the Socialist Commonwealth. The Professor desired to know “how would Socialism estimate what a school teacher produced,” or, “what would be the pay for a school teacher.”

Prof. Mattox’s doubts arise from two errors. One error may be called an error of economic mathematics; the other error is one of sociologic reasoning. Both errors resolve themselves ultimately into errors that bad habits of thought generate, these bad habits of thought being the inevitable result of the immoral standards that capitalist society keeps up.

To the proof:—

The error of economic mathematics consists in the failure to understand that, if it requires 2 with which to multiply 10 in order to obtain 20, the 2 is as indispensable to the result 20 as the 10 is. There is no useful effort imaginable in any one direction that does not promote the productivity of useful labor in all other directions. Co-operation implies subdivision of work, such subdivision being requisite to plentiful production. If the same man who makes a pair of shoes has to cart them to market, has to weave and tailor the cloth he needs to work in, has to raise the food he needs to live and thereby work, has to attend to the instruction of his children, etc., etc.—the result would be that infinitely fewer pairs of shoes could be produced, and in infinitely longer time. Shoes, in this instance, being the objective, it follows that the labor performed in other and tributary lines, is productive in shoes. The railroader, the weaver, the tailor, the food raiser, the teacher, etc., etc.—all are producing shoes. All being NECESSARY, all are entitled to an equal share. Sticking to the teacher, the shoemaker in question but distributes

the necessary labor—he attends to the shoe department, the teacher to the spanking department. Each doing work that the other can not do without, both are equally useful, hence equally entitled to equal pay.

Truth is moral, Untruth is immoral. Failure to apply the above mathematical truth is immorality. Human action, nevertheless, can not always hew close to the moral line. Whatever the reason—that may and must be left out of the argument at this place, as irrelevant—the fact is that human action, always tending toward progress, is guided by the law of Self-preservation. It is with Society as with the individual. As with the individual, who in Self-preservation is seen—as with shipwrecked mariners committing the cannibalism of eating up each other—so with Society. Its acts tho' always aspiring to the moral ideal, are controlled by the physical necessities. Accordingly, an immoral social standard may be unavoidable if material conditions bar the way to the moral standard. These considerations are introductory to the analysis of Prof. Mattox's second error.

Equality of returns for all necessary service—founded tho' it be upon Truth, and, therefore, moral—may be an impossibility if society is to survive. Let us take this example: A certain father's income is \$6 a day. He has two children. It requires \$2 apiece to support each properly. But it happens that one of his two children is an invalid requiring double the amount, \$4, in order to give him a chance in life. What are the material conditions and their results? That father would need \$8 to get along; he has only \$6. Someone must suffer—either he, or his well son, or the cripple, or all the three. No amount of aspiration after the ideal moral standard can stretch \$6 into \$8. Material necessity here compels a lower standard. On the other hand take this other example: Another father—with the same two sons, one well, the other a cripple, and the same \$2 being requisite for the proper sustenance of himself and the well child, and, finally the same \$4 being required for the cripple—but having an income, not of \$6 but of \$100. What is the result of these material conditions? The result is that the distressful state of things, which in one instance forced the father to lower his moral standard by adapting his views to the physical possibilities, now exist no longer. The physical possibilities for the ideal moral standard having set in, that moral standard will assert itself. So with Society.

Whether the moral standard, concerning the equality of returns to all, upon the

ground of the economic Truth that all are equal contributors to the common store, for the reason that the labor of all is necessary to produce that store—whether that moral standard prevails, or does not prevail, does not depend upon the moral sense; it depends upon the material possibilities. If society is at the material stage of father No. 1, then the economic Truth, that all labor is co-operative, therefore equally necessary, therefore entitled to equal returns, will not prevail, because it cannot. On the contrary, if society is at the stage of father No. 2 the economic Truth should and will prevail because it can. The whole question resolves itself into one of material facts, hence possibilities. Is society to-day at the stage of father No. 1, or of father No. 2? The answer is unrefutable. Society is to-day at the stage of father No. 2. The co-operative labor of the race is to-day so tremendously productive that the economic Truth stands out unobscured by the fumes of Self-protection that once beclouded it.

The one-time complicated social bookkeeping, complicated because of the unsatisfiable conflict of interests, with its immorality necessarily enforced by policemen's clubs and soldiers' bayonets—that social bookkeeping is no longer necessary. Its continuance by capitalism is a crime of capitalist society. Material possibilities no longer require the artificial “estimating” of the relative value of human labor. All social labor is equally valuable. The pay of school teachers should be as high as the pay of street cleaners, shoemakers, railroaders, or any other useful endeavor—and WILL BE in the approaching CO-OPERATIVE COMMONWEALTH.

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

Uploaded November 2009

slpns@slp.org