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EDITORIAL

“OTHER THINGS BEING EQUAL.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

AMONG the great speeches that are being delivered in Congress, Senator Bailey's on the National Banking Laws occupies front rank as great—great, in the sense of wondrously silly.

The Senator declared that prices would adjust themselves to any volume of money, “because,” said he, “the same amount of labor or commodities, other things being equal, would command precisely the same amount of money; and the same amount of money, other things being equal, would command precisely the same amount of labor or commodities.”

“Other things being equal,” is good. Seeing, however, that with the commodity labor, or labor-power, it is of the essence of capitalism that “other things are not equal,” Senator Bailey's science is reared on a fallacy.

“Other things are equal,” at least in the long run, with all commodities, except the commodity labor, or labor-power. If the production of gold is not plentiful, what that means is that the output of gold requires more labor-power than when the production of gold is abundant. In the long run commodities sell at their value: “other things remain equal”: exchange consists in giving value for value: a certain amount of gold, with more social labor crystallized in it, will exchange for a certain amount of cloth of equal labor-power, that is, will exchange for more yards of cloth than the same amount of gold would exchange for if the production of gold were more plentiful, and, consequently, less labor-power were required. But “other things are not equal” with the commodity labor-power. In the instance of that particular commodity, the perturbing cause, which causes prices to decline—an excess of supply not caused by a decline in the amount of labor-power crystallized in it—is not accidental, it is not sporadic, it is not subject to the tricks of speculation. In the instance of that particular commodity, the “perturbing cause” is permanent; it is a feature and a necessity of capitalism. Indeed, Marx shows, that the historical

starting point of capitalism consists in the settled permanence of that otherwise “perturbing cause.” An over-supply, or excess of labor-power in the labor market is a capitalist necessity as a starter; and the starting necessity develops into a broadening feature of capitalism in the measure that capitalism takes fuller and fuller swing. Relatively, and, from period to period, absolutely, the excess of labor-power increases in the labor market. Like a man given to the stimulant of liquor, needs larger and larger quantities of the stimulant to keep him stimulated, capitalism, which needs an excess of labor-power to get on its feet, needs larger and ever larger quantities of the stimulant to keep it agoing.

The long and short of the story is that, under capitalism, there is one commodity, the commodity labor-power, the price of which does not, can not “adjust itself to any volume of money.” If the volume of money is low, that is, if the value of gold is high, the permanently perturbing cause of an excess and increasing excess of labor-power will cause the price of labor (wages) to be depressed still more. If, on the contrary, the volume of money is high, that is, if the value of gold is low, that same permanently perturbing cause of an excess and increasing excess of labor-power in the labor market will counteract the cause which, with all other commodities, would tend to raise the price: the price (wages) of labor-power will in fact decline.

It is in this circumstance that the impossibility of the continuance of capitalism lies. Capitalism reduces human beings to the level of a commodity. “Other things remain equal” with all commodities, labor excepted. Seeing that the revolting fact of human beings being reduced to the level of things is one with which “other things,” so far from “remaining equal,” wax more and more unequal, even unto the breaking point—in view of that fact the Emancipation of Labor and the Downfall of Capitalism are mathematical conclusions.

“Other things being equal,” is but an intellectual opiate which Providence forces to the lips of the doomed Capitalist Class. Providence has a way of liking its doomed agents to be startled before falling. The opiate of “other things being equal” is working.

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

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