

EDITORIAL

ARITHMETIC LEFT OUT.

By DANIEL DE LEON

A CHICAGO firm, towards the celebrity of whose name we care not to contribute by stating it, announces in a large number of papers a “9,059-Word Business Book” to be had for the outlay of just 1 cent. The announcement informs the cent spender of all the things that the acquisition of the book will enable him to do. It will enable him to “boost his salary”, if he is an employee, and it will enable him to “increase his profits”, if he is an employer. In short, the book will “start the purchaser on the road to better things” by equipping him with “priceless business experience squeezed from 112 big, successful men.” It is quite obvious that a knowledge of elemental arithmetic is not among the equipments that the priceless 9,059-Word Business Book furnishes.

A simple argument will prove the fact.

Say that every employee in the land were to invest that penny, get the equipment, and (the advertisement will, of course, keep its promise) “boost” his salary. And say that, simultaneously, the employers of these employees were also to make the penny investment and get the equipment—could the latter set simultaneously “increase their profits?” Or, inversely,—say that these employers were to take the lead, make the penny investment; acquire the equipment; and, as promised by the advertisement, “increase their profits”; and that, close upon the employers’ heels, the employees also were to chip in their penny each, and get equipment—could these, simultaneously with their employers, “boost their salary”?

It is a problem in arithmetic. The problem resolves itself into this—to divide a whole in such a way that both sides get a bigger slice. Arithmetic teaches the thing can not be done.

Profits and wages come out of ONE heap—the heap of wealth raised by the toil of the worker. Out of that heap the employer takes his share, which he calls

“profits”; out of that heap the employee receives his share, called wages. Arithmetic teaches that, if profits are “increased,” the increase must be made at the expense of what is left of the heap for wages; and, vice versa, if wages are “boosted,” the boosting must be done at the expense of what remains in the heap for “profits.” Simultaneously to “boost” wages and “increase” profits is like a proposition to increase the number of quart measures taken out of a gallon.

The 9,059-Word Business Book may be full of information as an egg is of meat. Yet information on one thing it does not contain. That thing is—PLAIN ARITHMETIC.

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