

EDITORIAL

MATHEMATICS IN ECONOMICS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

A CORRESPONDENT of the Single Tax persuasion presents an ingenious argument in favor of Socialists standing by the Single Tax. He says: "Socialists surely admit that private ownership of land values is the cause of part of the present poverty of the people; and, if abolished, that part of the present poverty would be abolished."

Our correspondent's argument is based on the following mathematical proposition: If you have 100 cents in your pocket and a pickpocket filches 50 cents from you, you have 50 cents left. The principle is correct in mathematics, it is incorrect in economics:

If a tiger and a lion are in the habit of devouring a lamb every morning, the mathematics of our Single Tax friend would lead to the conclusion that, if you abolish the tiger, there would be one half of the lamb left over. This is correct arithmetical mathematics, but absurd economic mathematics. If the tiger is abolished, the result would be that the lion would have the lamb all to himself. Before the abolition of the tiger, tiger and lion shared the lamb between them. After the abolition of the tiger, the lion no longer needs sharing, he can grow doubly fat, having the tiger's old share, besides his own, to feast upon.

It would be thus the moment the landlord tiger were abolished, if the capitalist lion is left unabolished. To-day the present poverty is due to the joint exploitation of capitalist and landlord. The wealth (lamb) produced by labor is shared by the tiger landlord and the lion capitalist. Abolish the tiger, and the result will be, not that the lion capitalist will respect the share of the defunct tiger landlord and say: "I shall none of that!" but that my lord lion capitalist will have twice as much. To-day he can only take that portion of Labor's fleece which is left after the landlord has taken his slice. Abolish the landlord, and the only result worth mentioning would be

that the capitalist would have and take, and hold and gobble up the whole of Labor's fleece. Things would be just as before—in so far as Labor is affected. The only difference would be that the capitalist lion would have had his condition improved.

Much lies in the clear understanding of this matter. It implies the difference between being duped by Reform, or reserving one's energies for effective work. The false Single Tax economic mathematics, exposed above, runs through the whole gamut of free trade, prohibition, cheap gas, cheap rides, etc., etc., moves. The cheapening of goods, through free trade or any such other scheme, that leaves the capitalist on his feet, only removes one of the hyenas, with the result that the remaining ones have just so much more of the plunder from Labor to feast upon.

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

Uploaded November 2009

slpns@slp.org