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EDITORIAL

THE “COST OF LIVING.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

STATISTICS have been issued by the so-called Department of Labor at Washington upon the “Cost of Living.” The book is a bulky publication. It is many hundred pages thick. It is profusely supplied with tables. It makes a tremendous parade of exhaustiveness and accuracy. May be the contents of the book were gathered in the sincere belief that they exhaust the subject, and furnish a reliable source of ample information, to which to refer, and upon which inquirers could plant themselves; may be the contents of the book are mere “padding”—matter thrown together upon the principle that Ruskin declares his lawyer proceeded when he filled a thick roll of fool’s-cap on a very simple legal transaction, merely to “make something out of nothing”; maybe, also, the book is a deliberate attempt—an attempt of the regulation type that Government officials are paid for making—to befog and mislead the Working Class upon its actual condition. However the case may be, the Government’s report on the cost of living is woefully deficient. How deficient may be judged from the flood of facts that the stress of circumstances are forcing capitalist representatives themselves to admit.

Dealing with the topic of the “Cost of Living,” the address on *The Preamble of the Industrial Workers of the World*, delivered in Minneapolis on July 10, 1905, utters the caution:

“Intimately connected with the subject of the price paid for goods is the subject of the quality of the goods. Again let me illustrate before entering upon the subject itself. Suppose that twenty years ago I paid \$10 for a suit of clothes, and that that suit lasted me two years, say two winters. Now, suppose again that this year a suit of clothes, that looks as good, lasts me only one year, say one winter. What does that show in point of price? It shows that, whereas twenty years ago a \$10 bill furnished me with clothing for two years, now a \$10 bill furnishes me with clothing for only one year. In other words, if I do not wish to be in rags the second year, the clothing

that twenty years ago cost me only \$10, now costs me \$20. The conclusion from this fact is that 'deterioration' of goods spells 'increased price.' On the face of things the price has remained what it was; in point of fact it has gone up. Now, then, both in food and clothing the length to which deterioration has gone during the last twenty years staggers imagination. The reports of the shoddy turned out by our factories would be incredible were they not so well authenticated. This is a matter of general experience. It is particularly the housekeeper who makes acquaintance with this fact. . . .

"Similarly with food. There is hardly an article of food, especially the food that the workingman can afford to buy, that is not adulterated; consequently, has not deteriorated in quality; consequently, has not risen in price. Essays galore are cropping up upon the length to which this baneful practice has gone. These essays show that health is thereby undermined, even if life is not thereby speedily snuffed out. One of these essays of recent date claims that the food adulterations are directly responsible for the death of over 400,000 infants a year, and it traces the sickness and death of thousands upon thousands of adults to the same cause."

And more recently their hands forced and the tongues of some of their advocates loosened by the events, which brought these scandalous facts to a pass when they could no longer be Pecksniffanly brushed aside, Bishop Fallows was constrained to make the admission:

"If all the manufacturers of these body-destroying products were to aggregate their establishments on some vast acreage like that of Packingtown, and the nefarious secrets by which the most abhorrent substances known in toxicology are insidiously inserted in the food and drink of millions were to be laid bare in graphic style, the present outcry against the Chicago slaughter houses would be like the breath of a zephyr compared to the thundering voice of a Western tornado."

The pointed exposure of the facts, has been glibly denounced as "scandal-mongery." The Socialist has been assailed as "scandalous" for uncovering the truly scandalous facts furnished by capitalism. The exposure deals a double wound to the Capitalist Class. It tears up the capitalist's pretenses to morality; it also strikes the axe at the root of the capitalist's false economics. Leaving aside the moral aspect of the question, the economic aspect of the question is important in that it has a direct bearing upon the share of Labor in the product of its toil. The cost of living has risen

stupendously. *Bradstreets* claims it has risen 55 per cent. since 1896. It has risen, not visibly only, but invisibly. Not only have prices risen directly—the ominous item of rent included—but they have risen INDIRECTLY, through the deterioration of the goods that the Working Class needs to live upon. These facts are ignored by the official statisticians of capitalism and by all those who, though not enjoying the perquisites of such, are tarred with the same stick.

No figures on the “Cost of Living” are reliable which do not consider the item of “deterioration.” That item considered, the superstructure of “Labor’s Prosperity,” raised by capitalist statisticians on doctored figures of wages, tumbles down over their ears. What with an actually declining wage, and a cost of living which rises, both visibly, through rising prices, and invisibly, through the lower quality of goods, conservative is the estimate that the share of the Working Class is barely one-fourth of the product of its toil.

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