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EDITORIAL

“HOW TO BREAK HIGH PRICES.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

SPEAKERS for Socialism frequently ask for some compendious booklet for use on the road. We recommend to them something more compendious than a booklet. It is the 6x2½ four-paged leaflet issued under the above title by the National Mercantile Stock Co.

The “National Mercantile Stock Co.” is the latest alias assumed in this country by that, in this country, exploded combination of Visionariness and Self-seeking, known generally as the “Co-operative Stores,” “Co-operatives,” for short. The leaflet issued by the concern compresses within a short area of paper such a multitude of economic errors that, if a Socialist speaker were to “take the tip” of but three in each speech he could keep going, without ever repeating himself, for fully 52 times 7 days.

For instance:

“Jefferson wrote in the Constitution, resolved that all men are created equal, that does not mean that men are equal in figure, form or finance, but it means that they should have equal opportunity. Let us try and make the Constitution a reality by giving to man the liberty and happiness that the Constitution outlines. The National Mercantile Stock Co. is endeavoring in its way to bring about these results.”

How? By overthrowing the capitalist social order? Or by drilling the people to overthrow it? No. The National Mercantile Stock Co. gives answer to the “How” by proceeding to state:

“We are chartered to manufacture, produce and sell.”

In other words, the “liberty and happiness” that the Constitution outlines, and which the National Mercantile Co. admits is not to-day enjoyed by our people, are to be vouchsafed to them, not by overthrowing the liberty-and-happiness-subversive

social system, but by competing with it, in other words, by sustaining the social theory that underlies it.

If a private stock corporation, with a capital of pennies only to the billions of capital controlled by the liberty-and-happiness-subversive social order of to-day,—if such a private stock corporation can restore liberty and happiness to the people, then Capitalism is not of itself and inherently the cause of liberty-and-happiness-subversion.

If a private stock corporation, with a capital of pennies only to the billions of capital operated by the capitalist class,—if such a private stock concern can “break high prices” then political economic science must first be turned upside down; then puny capital must be able to produce more cheaply than gigantic capital; then the Socialist and supposed scientific law of exchange-value is a wild chimera; then the class struggle is non-existent.

Experience—in this country of perfected capitalism, besides a fluent population,—has established the fact that “Co-operative” schemes improve the condition of the schemers only. They improve the condition of the schemers, not by “breaking prices” for the schemers, but by putting enough money in their pockets to enable them to reach the high prices—so long as their visionary and innocent victims remain innocent and visionary enough to take stock in the schemers’ phrases.

“Co-operatives,” in such a capitalist country as ours, are a denial of each and every tenet of Socialism which the “Co-operatives” affect to wish to boost. The bobbing up of the “Co-operative” farce-fraud under the guise of the “National Mercantile Co.” with headquarters at Saginaw, Mich., should not be allowed to go to waste. In order to turn it to best advantage, the superb speech of Jules Guesde, delivered at the Paris Congress of the French Socialist Party, on that very subject is reproduced in this issue.¹

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¹ [‘Co-operatives’ and Socialism,’ by Jules Guesde.]