

EDITORIAL

THAT 4TH QUESTION.

By DANIEL DE LEON

PRESIDENT Julius Rosenwald of the Sears, Roebuck & Co., the large Chicago department store, being summoned to testify before the State Senate Commission investigating vice, it was announced in advance that the president of the firm would be asked the following questions:

1.—“Under what conditions do the girls work in your plant?”—That is an intelligent question: conditions are environment: environment has molding power.

2.—“What wages do they receive?”—Also an intelligent question. Material foundations are determining factors in virtue and in vice.

3.—“Can they live on their wages?”—Also an intelligent question, intelligent upon the same ground as Question 2.

4.—“Can the Company afford to pay them better?”—A stupidly vicious question that knocks the bottom from under the preceding sensible ones.

If a Company can not afford to pay wages that will furnish the material basis for the decent livelihood of its girl employees, then it follows that the Company's existence depends upon and is a promoter of vice; hence has no business to exist; hence, should long ago have bespoken the attention of the District Attorney as a center of crime.

Finally, the question is vicious also in that it silently proceeds from and suggests the false theory that a Company pays according as it can afford. Whereas the fact is that the premises from which a Company proceeds are, not the size of loot it pockets, but the helplessness of the wage earner, hence the minimum it can get Labor for. The premises from which a Company proceeds is the theory that it is entitled to all it can squeeze out of the wage-earner, and that every penny the wage-earner receives is an outrageous act of extortion against the Company, an extortion

that is subversive of “law,” “order,” “patriotism,” “religion,” the “flag” and the “sanctity of the family.”

That 4th question tells the tale of the kinship of Politician and Company.

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