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EDITORIAL

TWO “COMMON LOTS.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

IF any there be who imagine Mark Twain has a monopoly of humor, he is mistaken. Goldwin Smith has his own good share of the commodity. Invited by the *Daily Herald* of Stratford, Canada, to give his opinion upon the “present labor situation” (which seems to be a burning affair in Canada also) the gentleman consented, and the *Daily Herald* of June 22 publishes his “wise remarks”—it should rather have said “droll remarks.”

Among the lot of drolleries, announced as “wise remarks,” Goldwin Smith says: “Just now prices have risen, reducing the purchasing power of the wage”—so far so good; but listen to the rest of the sentence—“**THOUGH THIS HAS AFFECTED NOT ONLY THE ARTISAN, BUT ALL ALIKE, AND NO PARTICULAR CALLING CAN CLAIM EXEMPTION FROM THE COMMON LOT.**”

One can hear, without much straining of the ear, the roars of happy laughter, and loud, long and prolonged applause with which the raisers of prices must have greeted the joke of theirs being the “common lot.”

Beginning with that most ominous of the necessities of life, housing—the landlord, no doubt, shares the “common lot” of having to pay higher prices for bread, sugar and meat, etc. But the “commonness” of his “lot” is fully assuaged by the higher rent which he extracts from the seller of the bread, the seller of sugar, the seller of meat, etc.

The seller of bread, no doubt, shares the “common lot” of having to pay higher prices for rent, sugar and meat, etc. But the “commonness” of his “lot” is equally assuaged by the higher price he demands and gets for his bread from the landlord, the seller of sugar, the seller of meat, etc.

The seller of sugar, no doubt, shares the “common lot” of having to pay higher prices for rent, bread, and meat, etc. But the “commonness” of his “lot” is assuaged

in even tempo by the higher price he demands and gets for his sugar from the landlord, from the seller of bread, the seller of meat, etc.

The seller of meat, no doubt, shares the "common lot" of having to pay higher prices for rent, bread, and sugar, etc. But the "commonness" of his "lot" is, as in the previous instances, fully atoned for by the higher price he demands and gets for his meat from the landlord, the seller of bread, the seller of sugar, etc.

In short, the tryingness of the "common lot" of the landlord, the seller of bread, the seller of sugar, the seller of meat, etc., is purely imaginary. They each pay higher prices for the goods they buy, but they instantaneously recoup themselves by returning the compliment on other traders.

How is it with the workingman? He also has a commodity to sell—labor power. Can he recoup himself by demanding a higher price for his merchandise? He can not. Rent, bread, sugar, meat, etc., did not go up because of either an increased demand or decreased supply: as to the demand it remained what it was, as to the supply it rather increased. Rent, bread, sugar, meat, etc., went up due to the combined causes of monopoly, and of increased productivity of gold, that reduced the exchange value of money. With the commodity labor power things stand differently:

First, there can be no thought of the Working Class "monopolizing" labor power: the day the Working Class will be so organized that it could play that trick, that day the trick becomes useless; that day the Working Class will play its trump card, it will cease to be merchandise, it will overthrow the capitalist system.

Second, the supply of labor power in the labor market is ever on the increase and thereby ever lowers the price of labor power.

Accordingly, higher prices, or a decreased purchasing power of the wage, leaves the workingman in practical helplessness. He may strike: in 9 cases out of 10 he will lose his strike; in the 1 case out of 10 that he does not lose outright his gains never bring him up to the height reached by the risen prices. Higher prices are a plague for which there is no recoupment for the workingman in present day American capitalism. To him the alternative is—bend lower under a heavier burden, or organize industrially and overthrow the capitalist system.

Obviously, there are two distinct "common lots"—one the "common lot" of the

capitalists, the other the “common lot” of the wage slaves. Exquisite is the Goldwinian drollery that the identical lot is common to both sets.

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

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