

EDITORIAL

CHLOROFORMIC ECONOMICS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

A CERTAIN firm—we care not to advertise the concern by naming it—located in Massachusetts announces one of its wares in this philanthropic style:

“Wanted—A skilled stenographer for a week.

“That advertisement brought hundreds of replies.

“This event has set people thinking.

“Why should a stenographer work for such a meager wage?

“Because he or she has graduated from a stenographic school but never has received sufficient education in spelling, punctuation and the use of English. It is this ignorance that keeps the average stenographic wage so low.”

In view whereof the firm urges stenographers, and other office employes, to hurry up and buy the dictionary which it offers, and from which they will learn spelling, punctuation, and the English language. The firm calls that dictionary an “insurance against losing employment.”

Of course, it will do no harm to any office employes, of those who may buy that Massachusetts firm’s dictionary, to own such a book. Of course, it may even do them good, in so far as the ownership of a dictionary may be aidful in obtaining useful information. The more a person knows, the better for him. Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether the good that may result from owning a dictionary will counteract the evil of the false economics that such an advertisement instills.

The economic theory upon which the Massachusetts firm’s advertisement is pivoted and which it disseminates is that the wages of the employe in any line of work depend upon his capabilities. In office work, for instance, if he knows little of the English language and has a defective spelling and punctuation, his wages as stenographer will be \$6 a week; if, however, his English is good, spelling and punc-

tuation faultless, his wages will be higher, a good deal higher.

Such an economic theory is perverse. It is benumbing to the intellect of the proletariat.

With capitalism in full swing unchecked by intelligent unionism, the wages of the wage earners depend not upon the wage earner's yield. Under such capitalist conditions, the wages of the wage earners depend upon the supply of and the demand for them in the labor-market. Consequently, the abler a wage earner, what his ability does is, not to bring him larger earnings, but to furnish a larger clip to the capitalist shearer. And so it may happen, as it actually is happening, that with increasing abilities, the earnings of the wage earners are lower than they were when the wage earner knew less—the reason being the steady trend of the labor market to be more and more overstocked, and the prevalence of Gompers-Mitchell-Stone Civic-Federationized and Militia-of-Christized Unionism to assist the capitalist shearer of labor.

The conclusion is safe that what the advertiser of the dictionary is after is sales and profits; hence that if the firm thought it could make more sales and larger profits by inducing working people to buy chloroform it would advertise that, instead of the equally chloroformic economics that better English, spelling and punctuation will fetch high wages for all.

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