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EDITORIAL

“OBVIOUSLY,” A NEW DISCOVERY.

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PROF. Laughlin, of the Chicago University, is the discoverer of what certain newspapers that denounce them most, have hailed as “hope for labor unions.” According to the Prof. of the Standard Oil seat of learning, “the practical policy of labor unions is based on the principle of a monopoly of a supply of laborers in a given occupation.” Now, he contends, this policy for various reasons, among them being the existence of a large number of non-union men, does not work. Therefore the Prof. offers, as a substitute, “the principle of productivity, as a basis on which the actions of the unions shall be founded.” And to clinch this highly disinterested and intellectual offer, the Prof. adds: “Obviously, to escape from the thralldom of an oversupply of labor in a given class, or occupation, the laborer must improve his productivity. That is another way of saying that if he trains himself and acquires skill, he moves up into a higher and less crowded class of labor.”

“Obviously,” the Prof.’s theory of productivity versus monopoly, appears logical and sound, but are there not some things in practice that demonstrate that it is not as beautiful as it looks? If the condition of labor improves as labor’s productivity increases the demand of labor, how does it happen that in those very skilled industries where the productivity of labor has increased by leaps and bounds, Labor’s condition has grown worse through the existence of a super-abundance of labor? The productivity of labor has increased tremendously in the steel, iron, machine, shoe, cotton, sugar, meat packing and coal mining industries, for instance, yet strikes in them for an increase of wages, or against reductions of the same, have failed through the presence of the unemployed. “Obviously” the Prof.’s learned theory does not square with the actual facts.

Again, if the condition of labor improves as labor’s productivity increases the demand for labor, how comes it that the intensification of labor’s productivity, by

means of the premium and piecework systems, is steadily resisted by labor; while the system of “soldiering” and the “ca’ canny” principle is upheld by it, resulting in lockouts that are generally made effective by scabs? Is labor crazy in resisting that which “obviously” makes for its welfare? “Obviously,” the theories of the learned Prof. are not substantiated by labor’s history and practices.

The fact of the matter is that, under Capitalism, an increase in labor’s productivity is followed by an increase in labor’s ranks. Never was the productivity of Labor as great as it is now; and never has the army of the unemployed been as large as it is at present. Increased productivity brings supply and demand into play against and not for labor; and in this is the secret of its decline and practices. Accordingly, this new “hope for labor unions” will not inspire labor with zeal for its promotion. Labor cannot recognize the beauty of the profound theories that put it out of work and wages, while pretending to help it to an abundance of both. Its instincts and interests make such a recognition impossible.

“Obviously” Prof. Laughlin had better try again. As the conflicting interests of capital and labor make an increase in labor’s productivity redound to capital’s benefit and labor’s disadvantage, his theories will meet with labor’s bitter opposition. On the other hand, labor is fast learning a new lesson. Labor is learning that the hope of its unions lies not in creating a labor monopoly, nor increasing production to its own detriment, but in organizing to end the conflict between capital and labor, by taking and holding the machinery of production and distribution in the interest of society—by abolishing Capitalism and establishing Socialism. Then and only then will Labor be free from an oversupply of laborers, and in a position to secure and enjoy the product of its toil.

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

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