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EDITORIAL

“NEW YORK AMERICAN”-ISMS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

A GENTLEMAN with the half poetic half martial name of Milo Hastings has been given space in the *New York American* to “nail,” in the “only way that the responsibility can be nailed for the rise in the cost of living,” and the gentleman is nailing away.

The argument of Mr. Hastings is quite simple. There is a rush from productive into non-productive work; the same number of farmers that in 1870 fed 100 bankers, now feeds 366 of these parasites; similarly with regard to other non-producers, such as lawyers, clerks, preachers, etc. This state of things is resolved into a clear proposition: If one man's cost of living is \$600 and one man can raise 1,600 bushels of potatoes, then if three men are raising potatoes and one man selling them, the potatoes must sell at fifty cents a bushel to support the four men; if, thereupon, a second man quits raising potatoes and makes his living selling potatoes, then only 3,200 bushels of potatoes are raised, and they must sell at seventy-five cents a bushel in order to support the same four men. Consequently, the rise in prices is due to the withdrawal of labor forces from production, and turning the same to non-productive services.

Here are blunders by the bushel for ye.

First blunder—It does not follow that if fewer men work at a productive industry than worked before, therefore the output is less. Improved machinery and methods of production can raise a larger output with fewer hands than more hands can with backward methods. As a matter of fact, potatoes and all other goods are now produced much more plentifully than before.

Second blunder—The price of goods does not depend upon the amount that it costs a man to live. The price of goods depends upon the supply of and the demand for the goods. Seeing that price seeks the level of value and attains it, one year with

another, and seeing that value depends upon the labor socially necessary and bestowed upon the production of goods, it follows that when fewer hands produce more goods in a given time, the value of the goods declines, and consequently their price also.

Third blunder—The transfer of labor from productive to non-productive occupations leaves unchanged the demand for the goods produced.

In short, for Mr. Hastings' theory to be correct the increased amount of non-productive labor must be accompanied with a decreased output; the price of goods must depend upon what the people need to live; and the transfer of labor from productive to non-productive occupations must effect an increase in the demand for the goods. Lo, three blunders that involve many times three more blunders.

And such is the blunderbussing that the *New York American* indulges in. Any wonder that its incubatees reason like carts abacking?

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