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EDITORIAL

SCIENCE IN CAP AND BELLS.

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THE capitalist class of Vancouver, B.C., have cause to rub their hands with glee. Capitalist economics and sociology are poisonous enough, God knows; but the worst possible thing is the false pretense of Socialist economics and sociology. Whether the pretense is intentionally or unintentionally false, makes no difference. Stupid love works as much injury as deliberate hatred. It matters not whether the *Western Clarion* means to befuddle the workers of its vicinity or not, certain is the conclusion that its idiotic editorial utterances—given, as they are, as though they were choice chunks of wisdom snatched by the *Western Clarion's* Moses amidst thunder and lightning from the top of the Sinai of Marx—can not choose but cripple for life the intellect of the unwary who imbibes them. One of these latest choice chunks of economic and sociologic idiocy, ladeled out as Marxism, is the editorial article that the *Western Clarion* perpetuates on the 18th of last month against Unionism.

The groundwork of the argument is a travesty of the Marxian law of exchange value, applied to the merchandise labor-power. In the chapter on Relative Surplus Value, in Marx's *Capital*, the fact is expressly stated that one of the methods that the capitalist adopts with the view of increasing his surplus value is to lower the wages of the laborer below the value of his labor-power, and that this method PLAYS AN IMPORTANT PART IN ACTUAL PRACTICE. The consideration of this method, it is there also expressly stated, is temporarily left aside. Later on, in the course of the work, this method of lowering the wages of the laborer below the exchange value of his labor-power, is taken up by Marx in all its ramifications and shown, indeed, to “play an important part in actual practice.” Of all this the uncommonly self-satisfied wiseacre Editor of the *Western Clarion* knows nothing, and seems to care less. True to the principle that a little knowledge puffeth up, he

prances around with the Marxian abstract law of exchange value and he “reasons”—commodities exchange in the market according to their exchange value: occasionally there are perturbations in this law: such perturbations are at the most but temporary: eventually exchange, “like water, finds its level”: therefore (sic.), whatever the incidental disturbances in the labor-market, they are only temporary, the commodity labor-power “will refuse to exchange for any considerable length of time except upon a correct basis”, the basis of its exchange value!!! Daily experience tells a different tale: to palm off such fustian as Marxism is positively grotesque.

The commodity cloth and the commodity labor-power fare, as Marx puts it, “in actual practice” materially different. With cloth a large supply is an indication of less social labor required for its reproduction, and, inversely, a small supply is an indication of increased social labor required. Consequently, however the money price of cloth may fluctuate in the market, owing to temporary perturbing causes, the money price and the exchange value of the cloth will in the long run coincide: the determining factor in the money price will be the exchange value, unaffected by the supply, the supply being, as shown above, nothing but a reflex of the exchange value of the cloth. The commodity cloth, accordingly, will, indeed, “refuse to exchange for any considerable length of time except upon a correct basis”—value for value. How, however, stand things in actual practice with the merchandise labor-power? Is, with labor-power, the increase or decrease of its supply a reflex of its exchange value? By no means, and eloquent is Marx upon the subject. With labor-power, as with cloth, the exchange value depends upon the identical factors, but with labor-power, differently from cloth, the source of increase or decrease in the supply is different. It is not a decreased or increased quantity of social labor, embodied in the laborer’s necessities of life, that raises or lowers the supply of labor-power. The supply of labor-power in the market is affected by causes of different category—to-day the principal cause is the displacement of labor and the expropriation of the middle class by improved machinery and methods of production. These are not transitory, they have become continuous forces. Consequently, with labor-power, the perturbing cause is not a casual, it is an abiding pressure. When bourgeois economists account for the price of cloth by “supply and demand” they but betray the superficial nature of their science. With

cloth, as with all other commodities, labor-power excepted, “supply” and “value” hang together, the former, however, depending upon the latter. With labor-power, “supply” and “value” are independent features. The perturbing cause of an ever rising supply operating permanently upon the exchange value of the merchandise labor-power, the money price thereof, which is the wages that the workingman receives, is permanently lowered; that money price can no longer coincide with the exchange value of the merchandise labor-power; the exchange value of that exceptional commodity can not, “like water, find its level”; that exceptional commodity can not “refuse to exchange for any considerable length of time except upon a correct basis”—value for value; that exceptional commodity is compelled to exchange upon an entirely different basis, the basis of distress. What happens exceptionally with other commodities is, in “actual practice”, to use Marx’s words, the imperative rule with labor-power. Of this radical difference, which arises from the respective sources of all commodities, labor-power excepted, on the one side, and the commodity labor-power, on the other, the flippant philosopher of the *Western Clarion* has no inkling, and the shallowness of his Marxism disables him from appreciating the weighty sociologic phenomena pointed out by Marx as the consequence of the difference and throws him heels over head into his next “scientific” balderdash.

With the asinine economic theory that the commodity labor-power exchanges value for value as its foundation, the “scientific” *Western Clarion* raises a sociologic structure to match. According to that luminary the struggle of the Working Class against the Capitalist Class is “the attempt of workmen to compel the exchange of their commodity labor-power for more than its actual cost in labor time”!!! If the workman is attempting to secure a wage larger than the cost in labor time of this commodity labor-power, it must follow that he is now receiving a wage equal to the cost in labor time of his commodity labor-power. There would be no Labor Question to-day, and the *Western Clarion* could not have sprung up like a weed, drawing nutriment from that soil, if that were the case. Whether the money price, that a workman receives for his commodity labor-power, be a dollar or a nickel, it would be all one to him, provided that dollar or nickel represented the exchange value of his necessities of life, that is, the exchange value of his commodity labor-power. If the

exchange value of his necessities of life, that is, his labor-power, rose and his price, that is wages, kept step with the rise, he would be no better off; neither would he be the worse off if his price went down correspondingly with a declining exchange value of his necessities of life. In either case, true or obedient to the law of the “vis inertiae”, which rules animate as well as inanimate nature, he would rest satisfied. The capitalist might, by the aid of improved methods of production, raise his relative surplus value mountain-high and revel in proportional luxury, while the workman remained where he was, and yet nothing would be doing. The sight of affluence, not enjoyed by himself, might kindle envy in the workman’s breast, it might even prompt to theft as a result—but envy never was and never could be the goad to a great historic Movement. That goad, in the instance of the proletarian uprising of our days is a DECLINING STANDARD OF WELLBEING. Sociologic theory points to a declining standard of wellbeing among the proletariat of the land; statistical economics substantiate the theory. The modern class struggle, which manifests itself in strikes, is not an attempt on the part of the workman to receive more than the exchange value of his merchandise labor-power; it is the attempt to resist the persistent pressure of the capitalists to make deeper and ever deeper inroads into the exchange value of his labor-power. The organized and the unorganized effort of the Working Class is, at first, the blind one of seeking to play at capitalists with their own commodity labor-power, ignorant of the fact that such a posture is disastrous to themselves: such a posture presumes the acceptance of the economic laws of capitalism: the law of exchange value, together with its corollary the law of wages and the law of supply and demand that flows therefrom and “demoralizes” the labor market, marks the wage-slave Ichabod. Later, when better schooled by experience, the effort of the Working Class is to emancipate themselves from the yoke of wage slavery. All the same, whether still blind, or when enlightened, that which goads the workman to action is not a hankering after prices above, but the necessity to keep the price of his labor-power from sinking ever deeper below par. This important cluster of facts, so essential to the understanding of Morgan-Marxian sociology, and to the grasping of the momentous issues of the day, can not choose but be, as it is, a sealed book to the “scientific” bat who imagines that the laborer receives to-day the full exchange value of his labor-power.

Finally, the *Western Clarion* caps the climax saying: “An understanding of the general proposition affords a sufficient groundwork upon which to base his [the workman’s] action in the struggle for his emancipation.” This is a summary of its previous “scientific” reasoning with something more added for good measure. It is the repetition of the economic asininity that, because labor-power is a commodity, and because cloth refuses in the long run to exchange otherwise than value for value, therefore labor-power also indulges in the refusal; and it is a repetition of the equally asinine sociology that the struggle of Labor in strikes is for wages above the value of labor-power. Upon this double-compound of intellectual hash the complicated filigree is fittingly added that such “knowledge” is ample for “action”, and that “these are days for action”—not for “scientific hairsplitting”, such “hairsplitting” being Unionism, the opposite of Unionism being “action”!!

It is clear, though to make any definite or precise statement is not in keeping with the *Western Clarion’s* style of “action”, that what it means is that the electric force of the Revolution must, in order to be effective, be collected in a political organization only—that, in the paper’s opinion, is “action”, Unionism is—well, anything but “action”.

The Socialist political organization is no organization for “action”, excellent though it is for propaganda. There is no political organization, and never was, that comprises more than an infinitesimal portion of its followers at the polls. Nor can any political body be imagined in which even a bare major fraction of such followers is within the organization. This circumstance is a feature of political bodies. This feature works no harm in bourgeois political Movements, whether for reform or otherwise. It works no harm because the power to enforce the political fiat is there in advance and in force. Consequently, the “action” required to enforce bourgeois politics never is wanting when bourgeois political bodies triumph. It is otherwise with the politics of the Revolution. Its power for action has first to be created. Seeing that such power does not, and can not lie within the political organization, the power has to be gathered outside of it. The requisite power outside of capitalist or bourgeois political bodies is the economic organization of the capitalist class: the requisite power outside of Labor’s political body can be none other than the economic organization of the Working Class—the Union. Action, the action that

tells, the action that will shatter the despotism of Czar Capital—that action, the Industrial Workers of the World holds and has proved must and can be the feat only of that economic body of the Working Class which gathers, and drills, and organizes, and focuses to a purpose the latent electricity of the Revolution. The “action” that the *Western Clarion* looks to is the “action” of parliamentarism, the action of a trifling fraction of the people organized in a political body, and led by a still frailer body of elected politicians. In short, it is the “action” that one might expect from a gun charged with powder and no balls—noise and nothing more. Where, except under the cap-and-bells, could hope in such scatterbrained “action” find lodgment?

Next to pure and simple Unionism, the science in cap and bells on which the *Western Clarion* rears its pure and simple political Socialism must be dearest to the capitalist heart.

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