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EDITORIAL

THE MONSTRILLA STAGE AHEAD.

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PARADOXICAL though it be, commodities are now economically cheaper than they have ever been before. That is to say, measured by some absolute standard, if any there be, a loaf of bread, for instance, would be found exchanging for less to-day than it has at any past period in the world's history. Though no capitalist dare admit it—because its implications convict him of being the sponger upon labor that he is—that standard exists. It is the amount of socially necessary labor power crystallized in the commodity itself. When it is considered that commodities exchange in the long run at their exchange value, and that exchange-value is determined by the quantity of socially-necessary labor power requisite for their production, and that, finally, the entire march of modern industry is toward reducing the amount of labor power embodied in a commodity, the conclusion of the unprecedented cheapness of goods cannot be escaped.

Yet no fact is more completely obscured by the fictions thrown up around it. The standard of value commonly used, and considered by horizonless economists as fixed, is not fixed. That standard is gold; and gold being itself a commodity, it undergoes the same fluctuations and gradual cheapening as other articles in the same category. As gold happens to have cheapened faster than almost any other commodity, the phenomenon is seen of all articles of consumption hastening toward great cheapness; gold, the accepted measure of value, outstripping all the rest; by this very outstripping making itself exchangeable for an ever smaller of other articles; and thus making it appear as if all the other articles had increased in value, whereas they have actually lessened. Thus the paradox is explained. Actually, absolutely, goods are cheaper; but considered in relation to gold, they are vastly dearer.

The effects of this progression upon the workingman are ominous. While the

commodities upon which he lives are, it is true, cheapening, he must buy those commodities with his money wages, which due to the process just outlined are cheapening still faster. Thus although the employing class, ably assisted by its A.F. of L. labor lieutenants, may point to a stationary or even a slightly rising wage for the workers in recent years, they carefully hide under a bushel the fact that even that increased money wage fails to go as far as the lower wage did previously when the wages themselves were worth more. Columns of wages paid may thus apparently show a gain for the wage earner; in fact they conceal a huge loss. Their face value may have remained the same, or gone up; their actual value, or purchasing power, has in all cases gone down.

Hence it comes that the cost of living is now at an acute high level never before known in this country. *Bradstreet's* index on its 96 standard commodities for January 1, 1910, is \$9.2310, an increase of 1.1 per cent. over the previous high record of March 1, 1907. Confined to 59 articles entering into personal consumption, and which affect the wage earner most directly, the rise is even steeper. What could be bought in 1896 for \$4.2177 would now cost \$7.2617—an increase of nearly 75 per cent. In those 14 years meats have increased about 75 per cent., textiles 83 per cent., and breadstuffs an appreciable fraction over a full 100 per cent. In some edibles prices have tripled. War time figures are no longer things to conger with; they are back numbers. Instead of the people bringing on the high prices by “insisting upon the freshest eggs, the purest milk, the best butter, and the best cuts of meat,” as one heels-over-head retainer of capital recently declared, the people by reason of those same high prices, over which they have no control, are having increasingly to put up with any old kind of eggs, any old kind of milk, any old kind of butter, any old kind of meat—if, indeed, they get any of these at all.

Fifty years ago Dana, the naturalist, found on the surface of the sea a little animal so singular in character that he called it the “monstrilla,” or little monster. Its distinctive feature was that it had neither means to capture food, nor to digest it if it could. As Dana says, it is “born to starve to death.” Living organisms can evolve downward as well as up. One of two things—either the monstrilla stage is ahead for the American workingman, or he must save himself by the means of Social Revolution.

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