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EDITORIAL

OPEN LETTER NO. 5.

By DANIEL DE LEON

TO Chas. H. Chase
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Comrade—

There is one more matter that your article of May 4 touches upon in a manner that leaves room for misapprehension. That particular matter is embodied in the following passage:

“Although the Universities are in some degree corrupted, I hope no Socialist will allow himself to be so affected by a knowledge of that fact as to forego any opportunity that may present itself for him to acquire the advantages which may nevertheless be gained from them.”

The view expressed in the passage is, to say the least, unguarded—unguarded as an expression of opinion at this particular season of social ferment.

Lecture rooms on mineralogy, on astronomy, on the differential calculus, on law, on electricity, on anatomy, on all of these and similar subjects, are not liable to become centers from which mental corruption radiates. True, there may be, as there often is, corruption in the appointment of the Professors in these, as in all other, branches;—but the corruption ends there. The reason is obvious. There is no motive for misdirecting instruction. There may be lack of up-to-dateness; there may be even ignorance; a set purpose to corrupt and mislead is not likely.

It is otherwise with regard to the social sciences. Some, indirectly, most of them directly, bear upon the class struggle. Indeed, it would go hard to pick out one branch of the social sciences that is not begotten of the palpitations of the class struggle. Where the class struggle palpitates material interests are at stake. It is an established principle that the material interests of a Ruling Class, in part, promote

immorality. To promote incapacity to reason upon the domain of sociology is one of the corrupt practices of Ruling Class material interests.

To illustrate—

Take the book—*Introduction to Economics*—by Henry Rogers Seager, Professor of political economy in Columbia University.

Section 130, which is marginally annotated “Wages Defined,” sets forth:

“Wages, as the term is used in economics, include all earnings assigned to men for their work, from lowest piece wages to highest annual salaries and ‘wages of management.’”

Sections 97 and 98 describe “wages of management” as that share of the product that falls to the “independent entrepreneur,” that is, the independent employer of labor, in other words, a capitalist; and the said “wages of management” the Professor states marginally “may be a very large sum.”

Watch the confusing uses that the two words “assigned” and “wages” are put to in these passages.

As to “assigned”—there is no “assigning” imaginable without there be an “assignor,” who does the assigning, and an “assignee,” who is the recipient of that which is assigned; and the two can not be the same person, and never are—except, of course, in fraudulent bourgeois commercial transactions. The assignor of their wages to the proletariat is the employer. The assignor of his “wages of management” to the employer is—who?—why, the employer himself.

Here we have a book that holds itself out as scientific, a book written by a University Professor of political economy, who, in a definition of wages, uses the identical word—“assigned”—confusingly. He uses the word in the performance of two nigh to grammatically, irreconcilable, besides economically opposed functions—first, the employers’ function of paying his wage-slaves the price of their labor-power; second, the identical employer’s opposite function of himself putting profits into his own pockets.

As to “wages”—the word, in economics, implies the existence of an economic wage-slave, the wage receiver, who is plundered of the bulk of his product, and an economic wage-slave-master, the wage doer, the plunderer. In sociology, the word, furthermore, implies the storm center of a violent struggle, the struggle, on the one

hand, of the Wage-Slave Class to throw off the yoke; the struggle, on the other hand, of the Class of the Wage-Slave-Master to keep the yoke on. Finally, in psychology, the word furnishes an illustration of the similarity of the methods adopted by criminal-code criminals and the methods of capitalists to disguise their identity:—criminals who are photographed for the Rogues Gallery frequently “make faces” for the purpose of rendering the picture unrecognizable; psychologically subconscious of the criminality of his class, the capitalist resorts to the “faces-making” of calling his plunder “wages,” and thereby palming himself off as a “wage-earner.”

Yet here we have a University Professor, in a definition of wages, indiscriminately applying the word “wages” at once, legitimately, to the badge of wage-slavery, and illegitimately to “profits,” the badge of the economic plunderbund,—in other words, aiding with a sort of economic photography the Capitalist Class in “making faces” and thus disguising its identity.

Prof. Seager’s book, tho’ in many respects worse than the run of University Professors’ books on economics, is typical of the brood. As illustrated in the instance of the Professor’s “definition of wages,” the economic and sociologic departments of modern Universities are intended to cultivate the art of being methodically ignorant of what everybody knows; and the student who has at all fallen under the spell must, before he can again claim the dignity of the genus “homo sapiens”—man and not a mental pervert—must, as has been well stated by a keen observer, first rid himself of the “nine-hundred and ninety-nine chestfuls of insufferable rubbish” that he has spent his University, or College, years in allowing himself. to be trepanned with. No wonder that, about eleven years ago, another Columbia University Professor, Munroe Smith, in an appeal for funds for the University, addressed himself to the rich, not because it is the rich who have the means to make donations, but upon the express ground that the socio-political atmosphere was calculated to endanger the status of the rich, and that the rich could look for no better breastwork than the Universities where the youth were trained. Our Universities are lights on the lee shore.

Healthy is the hope that “no Socialist will allow himself to be so affected by a knowledge” of the fact of the corrupt and corruption-radiating status of Universities as to “forego any opportunity that may present itself for him to acquire the advan-

tages which may nevertheless be gained from them”—healthy is the hope, provided it be accompanied with the warning that the Socialist, who enters the University precincts as a student, enter it on the same principle, and for the same purpose, that students of medicine may be recommended to enter a plague-infested locality. Fortified with economic and sociologic science, equipped with a healthy and logical mind, thus rendered immune to the contagion of bourgeois official economics and sociology, the Socialist may derive great advantage from our Universities—not so fortified, there is no telling what a mental cripple it will be that a diploma will be banded to when he graduates.

Fraternally,

ED. DAILY PEOPLE.

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