

EDITORIAL

BETTER SERVANT GIRLS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

A MONTCLAIR, N.J., lady, described as “estimable” and named Mrs. Edmond B. Osborne, is reported to have started a movement for “a Statewide domestic uplift” by making servant girls “better and more efficient” through a curriculum of instruction which is to provide classes on special waitresses’ courses, on cooking, on picking and preserving, etc., etc.

Upon Mrs. Osborne the lessons of experience and economics have been lost.

Increased efficiency gained by the proletariat never accrues to the benefit of the proletariat. It may accrue to the benefit of individuals among the proletariat, but then only transitorily so. The moment a large number of proletarians have increased in efficiency their efficiency accrues to the benefit of the employer only. What may be called the law of wages under capitalism reduces the increased wage that efficiency at first commands. In the long run the proletariat remains, as far as increased efficiency is concerned, just where it was before their efficiency was increased. The wage, the price of the merchandise labor-power remains under the control of supply and demand, a control that takes no cognizance of increased productivity, which means increased efficiency. Economics teach that, seeing labor-power is under capitalism merely a merchandise, increased productivity on the part of the proletariat is like increase of wool on the part of sheep. It translates itself merely into a larger clip for the employer.

Even if economics should be too “dry” a subject for Mrs. Osborne, the lady should be expected to have gained a certain minimum of experience. Experience teaches many an economic principle even to those who have not the first inkling of the principle itself. Experience tells that live stock deteriorates under poor and insufficient food. The proletariat is, under capitalism, of the live-stock category of merchandise. A declining wage deteriorates the article. At the lowest rung of the

working proletarian ladder is the “servant.” Horrible though factory conditions may be, the conditions of household service are, as a whole, incomparably worse, especially so if the service is of girls. Based upon this experience a wit once remarked that a “good servant” is a contradiction in terms. If the individual is good for much he or she would not be a servant: if the individual is a servant then she or he can not be good—surely not good for the employer.

Mrs. Osborne may be estimable; the lady certainly is woefully inexperienced.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded April 2012

slpns@slp.org