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EDITORIAL

A SYMPTOM OF OUR TIMES.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE first of the seven proposed amendments to the constitution, to be voted upon next election day in this State—the amendment to raise the salaries of State Senators and Members of the Assembly—deserves special attention as a pointer in the present social wilderness.

Proposals to raise the pay of our “honorable” legislators are nothing new. From Washington, where sits the Federal parliament, the tip was given a few years ago, and it has been greedily followed in a number of instances. In the instance of New York, however, the tip has been improved upon in a manner and in a direction that is significant.

The legislators’ demand for higher pay was uniformly planted upon the fact of the higher cost of living. Never once was the claim made, either in the pace-setting Federal parliament, or the pace-following State Legislatures, that there was any increase of work thrown upon the legislators’ shoulders since the establishment of the previous scale. Of course, of our higher-wages-demanding legislators often made long and fervid speeches to show how strenuous was their work, how necessary, how important, how etc., etc., etc.; but not for reason of that did they think their pay should be raised. The one argument,—in Washington as in New York and elsewhere—was “higher prices.” The cost of living having gone up, the pay of “the people’s servants” should rise proportionally. So far so good. From that point on, however, New York’s “servants of the people” struck out on a pioneer path.

Beginning with Congress, the salaries of the legislators in both Houses have been and still are the same. The members of the “Upper House,” so-called, received, and still receive, a salary no higher than those in the “Lower House,” so-called. Vice-versa, the members of a “Lower House” drew, and still draw, pay not a cent less than those in the corresponding “Upper House.” The functions of the two Houses be-

ing the same, whether the one is termed “Senate” the other “House of Representatives,” or “Assembly,” or what not, the remuneration of their members was, and continues to be, identical—New York excepted, if Amendment No. 1 prevails.

The State of New York proposes a new departure.

Beginning with Congress, all the States that followed suit in the salary grab, New York excepted, consistently stuck to their premises. The pretext for a raise being “higher prices,” the cause must strike all alike, Lower as well as Upper House members. Hence the salaries of all were raised alike. The New York State legislature “bolted” its premises. Altho’ the reason it alleged for higher pay was “higher prices,” it now proposes to raise the salary of its Senators by \$2,000 and the salary of its Assemblymen only \$1,500. Accordingly, should the amendment prevail, the New York Senators will draw \$3,500, while the Assemblyman will draw \$500 less—\$3,000.

The new departure—a higher salary for the Senate than for the Assembly—is significant. The equality between our two Houses is overthrown, and greater dignity, through higher pay, is attached to our “House of Lords” than to our “House of Commons,” that is, to the smaller House than to the more popular branch of the Legislature.

Even if the amendment is defeated, its proposal is symptomatic. The Legislature of the Empire State of the land thereby gives the hint to all the others that they place the stamp of “Law” upon, and thereby widen the economic and sociologic chasm that already divides our population. Keeping in mind the fact that the Legislature from which such a proposition flows is the identical one which, by means of its Sullivan Law, seeks to disarm, and, by means of its Levy Law, seeks to disfranchise the people, amendment No. 1 is all the more symptomatic.

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