

EDITORIAL

THE ROSEBURG BIDDY.

By DANIEL DE LEON

POKERS of fun at the outcry against high prices are turning to merry purpose the report from Oregon that there is a hen in Roseburg of that State, they name the hen the "Roseburg Industrious Biddy," whose record is 266 eggs in ten months and nineteen days. The fun pokers are singing the praises of the Roseburg Biddy as one who has done more to decrease the cost of living than any Trust buster, or all Trust busters combined.

The economic theory implied in the joke is that prices depend upon the supply, and that the supply of eggs having, so far as the theory lay in the power of the Roseburg Biddy, been phenomenally increased, the price of eggs, a necessary of life, could, would and should go down.

The conclusion is unwarranted.

An increased supply has only as an alternate consequence the consequence of a decreased price. The other alternative is the destruction of the increased supply, with a stationary price as the consequence.

Under normal conditions, an increase in the supply of eggs will lower the price of eggs in the egg market. But conditions are not always normal. They are frequently abnormal in this Age of ours. The abnormality that applies to the case in point consists in the circumstance that, under the present social system, it lies with the owner of abundance, whether he is willing to allow the abundance to be the blessing, that it theoretically is, or to cancel the blessing. Not infrequently the lowered price, that an increased supply brings in its wake, results in lower ultimate profits to the abundance owner; or it may result in increased expenditure to handle the abundance, and in thus cancelling the potentially increased profits. In either case, the upshot not infrequently is that the abundance is slanderously labelled "excess," and the "excess" is destroyed.

Peaches are periodically dumped into the Raritan Bay when the rays of the sun, combining with benign atmospheric conditions, has rendered the peach crop of New Jersey blessedly abundant. Only recently, the season having been exceptionally favorable in Brazil, and the coffee plantations having yielded a supply that was bound to send the price of coffee down, the London and New York gentlemen rulers of the coffee market sentenced the excess—tens of thousands of bags—to be burned as though the “excess” of the coffee were a heretic and the flames of the Inquisition were still lambent. Similar experiences have been made with sugar; with indigo; with a number of spices. Moreover, all around us a similar practice is observable in manufacture, wherever the yield of Labor has proved “excessive.” In the instance of manufactures, it is not the “excess” of the goods that is destroyed, but the excess of Labor’s productive power—the workers are “laid off,” their fertile brain and brawn is dumped upon the street for charitable reformers to practice statistics upon. The net result is the same.

To return to the Roseburg Bidly, her successful industrious efforts may no wise affect the egg market. It all depends.

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