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EDITORIAL

THE WRITING ON THE WALL.

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BULLETIN No. 71, just issued by the Department of Commerce and Labor, has a frontispiece statistical table of colored lines. The purpose of the picture is obvious. It would take too long to go through the 400 and odd pages of figures and discover that the country is marching with steady tread progressward. The table of colored lines is expected to present the picture at a glance—and accelerate the promotion of the much needed “confidence.” Fact is the picture does the opposite—to those with eyes to see. It reads like a “writing on the wall.”

There are four lines, running from right to left in zigzag. One is black, a second red, a third green, the fourth yellow.

The black line marks the ups and downs of the relative wages per hour. It shows that wages per hour have risen, since 1890, from an average of 100 to an average of 124 in 1906. Differently from such presentations, as a rule, the table conveys some information regarding the relative number of hours of work. Obviously it is not enough to know that a man’s wages increased from \$1 to \$2. If, at the time he received \$1, he worked six days in the week, then his earnings were \$6 a week; whereas, if, at the time he receives \$2 he is out of work four days in the week, his earnings would be only \$4, or \$2 less than when his wages were lower. The green line is intended to convey the desired information. It shows that the relative hours per week declined, since 1890, from an average of a little over 100 to an average of nearly 95. The green line evidently has the effect of causing the proudly ascending black line to dip, to dip, somewhat, how much it is impossible to ascertain from the figures with accuracy. Nevertheless, a dip there must be in point of total earnings suggested by the black line. Say the dip is 4—a conservative estimate. That brings the black line down to 120 for 1906.

The next line to study is the red line. It shows the trend of “retail prices of food weighted according to average consumption of in 2567 workingmen’s families.” According to this line, prices, starting in 1890 at an average of 102, went up; went down; went up again; then went down and down till the line intersects the black, green and yellow lines; reached low water mark in 1896, and from then on soared upward almost uninterruptedly until the line registers 116 in 1906—a rise of 14 per cent. Evidently, the red line also has a depressive effect upon the black line. It depresses the black line some more, in so far as the black line suggests total earnings, or the economic condition of Labor. An increase of 14 in prices during the period that is under consideration forces the dip of the black line down to 106 for 1906. But, painful though it be to humble so proudly erect a line as that black line, duty compels the forcing of still more humiliation upon it. The red line pictorially represents only the rise in the retail prices of food. But “man lives not of bread only.” Though the red line says naught regarding the prices of clothing; of course naught regarding the shoddiness of the same, which implies higher outlays for the same amount of goods; and says naught regarding the ominous rises in rent; etc.; etc.—though the red line omits all these items, that is no reason why they should be left out of consideration. It is obvious that prices must have risen higher than 116. Indeed, the items, left out of reckoning by the red line, are so ponderous that it is a conservative estimate to say the cost of living rose, since 1890 when it registered 102, until in 1906 it reached, if it did not pass, the 124 mark. Even if the red line should not be continued quite so high, it cannot be denied that the increased “average wage per hour” is, to say the least, wiped out, and the proud head of the black line, already made to dip by the green line to 120, and then by the red line itself to 106, is forced to bury itself in the dust that lies below the part where it started on its “triumphant march progressward.”

And now there is worse in store. Enters yellow line. It records the relative number of employes. It starts in 1890 below the red, below the green, below the black line. It starts at 94, and thence, with hardly any deviation, it mounts and mounts. It passes the red, it passes the green, it outstrips the black line, reaches in 1906 the highest mark on the canvas—144—and even seems to leap beyond.

Employe under capitalism means wage slave. A wage slave is a being utterly

dependent for existence on the judgment of the capitalist class. He is a being, human in appearance, in point of economic fact, he is no better than potatoes, or sacks of hay—dependent for its price upon the supply in the market, like any other staple. In short, the employe is a being exactly the opposite of that self-dependent element, architects of their own fate, such as it then was, that the country boasted of as its emancipator, its backbone, and its pride when it started upon its independent career. The statistical picture of colored lines presents the rush of the country to ruin—an outstripping line of ever more people sinking from the pristine elevation of self-dependence, and a seething gulf of misery below, drawing them into its depths.

“Get from under!”—such is the meaning of that towering Yellow Line, with accompanying lines of black, green and red. It is the “writing on the wall” that notifies the Belshazzar class of to-day its days are numbered, and that the class, that is to snatch the country from ruin, cannot much longer remain ignorant of its might, or fail to organize in order to fit it for its historic task.

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