

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 8, NO. 314.

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, MAY 9, 1908.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

NOT SEX, BUT CLASS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

ELSEWHERE in this issue will be found the reply to the *Outlook* made by the organization of New York woman teachers for the equalization of salaries.

The document is a “page of contemporaneous history.” It marks marked progress. Such a document was unimaginable a generation ago, it was not likely even fifteen years sooner than now. That social evolution, which, more powerful than sentimental declamation, is forcing woman to assert her standing, is obviously forcing teachers to approach the field of the Labor Movement. That they are doing so with considerable intelligence the document in question is cheering evidence of.

The document in question is, however, a “page of contemporaneous history” not only in that in which it is sound, but also in that in which it still is defective. Link by link the woman teachers have been emancipating themselves from the intellectual chain that once held them wholly fettered. The last clause in the document shows that there is still one link that must be snapped. The document closes with the statement that the present fight is one “against the habit of believing that because of sex alone, woman is worth less in money to this nation than man.”

This is an error. There is no such belief. There never was such belief. It is not from any such belief that the practice proceeded of paying woman less than man. The practice proceeded, not from a BELIEF, but from a FACT, from an ugly FACT, a FACT that is characteristic of capitalist society. What FACT is that?

Capitalist society has for its fundamental ethical cornerstone the principle: “Take all the advantage you can of the distress of others.” The principle can be put in shorter words: “One human being’s misfortune is another human being’s chance.”

It is no misfortune to be a woman. It is a misfortune to be a wage slave. And the

more numerous the wage slaves in any particular line of work, the greater the misfortune. Woman having been thrown, not by little and little, but wholesale, into the labor market, she was used to lower the wages of the workers whom she found there. These happened to be men. The excess of the supply of labor happening to be mainly female, lower pay was given to her, to begin with—not because of sex, but because of numbers. The original, exclusively male slave’s misfortune of having been torn from the land was utilized by the capitalist dispossessor to give that male slave only a pittance of what he produced. More dispossessments continued, larger numbers of employed wage slaves were thrown out of work through privately owned and improved machinery. The growing excess of the supply of labor produced more distress, and the distress furnished fresh “opportunities” to the capitalists. Wages were lowered, thus increasing profits. Then came the avalanche of woman workers. The greater supply increased still more the distress, especially among the newcomers. The consequence was still fresher “opportunities” for the capitalists; and this spelled still lower wages for the newest arrivals.

The day the woman teachers grasp this truth, that day they will realize that the issue is not one of SEX, but one of CLASS. That day they will recognize their kinship with the proletariat. That day will they be mentally emancipated—a condition precedent for all other emancipation.

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

Uploaded January 2010

slpns@slp.org