

ARTICLE

THE GLORIOUS “PER CAPITA.”

(With Compliments to Per Capita Carroll D. Wright.)

By DANIEL DE LEON

WHEN you walk along the street with nothing in your pocket, you are astonished when some statistically inclined person informed you that you are by no means a pauper, as “your per capita of the money in the country amounts to \$12.19^{2/5}.” The careful and industrious man who wishes his wealth to increase, and who holds all his wealth under the delightful heading of per capita, looks with concern upon the increase of the birth rate, and sighs a profound and just sigh when he finds that the general state of health is good and that people are not dying as they should. Each infant that comes into the world, and each man that tenaciously hangs onto life{,} does other beings a great wrong, because their lack of consideration in these matters has a tendency to decrease the per capita, and render the whole nation just so much poorer.

If there are ten dollars in a community, and there are ten persons, then the per capita is one dollar. Yet were one of the persons, in the course of human events, to give birth to a child, then disaster overtakes the community, because the per capita is only 90.9 cents. On the other hand, were a person to have the necessary spirit of sacrifice and die, then, to the great joy and comfort of all concerned, the per capita would merrily soar to \$1.111, and prosperity would be abroad in the land.

This is not a nation of poor men. Each man, woman, and child owns, in a per capitalial way, so many bricks, laths, nails, dollars, doughnuts, railway ties, office buildings, rail-fences, acres of land, feather beds, sub-marine boats, Easter eggs, cows, books, undershirts, bonnets, engines, plugs of tobacco, boiled onions, street cars, policemen, fire shovels, news papers, etc.,—not to speak of taxes—and he or she consumes them with the regularity of clock-work. You may object that you have no such things. O, yes, you have, the per capita is very evenly distributed, and it is increasing all the time, so a man who complains is not worthy of the name of American.

The *American Grocer* has just come forward with some figures which prove that drinking is on the increase. An average of four and one half cents a day is spent on drinking. So this proves that there is no man who is a drunkard, and none who does not drink, for surely a decent, honest, law-abiding citizen could not think of slighting his fractional schooner when it came around. One drink a day is very little, and if you take more than one you deprive someone else of his share. A man who sits down to a cold bottle, and rushes the bottle till the night grows old, and pays for the bottle several dollars, has drunk in that time the per capita of many years, and he will have to work assiduously to keep his record. He usually does. The honest, hard-drinking man, who devotes himself in a steady, dogged, systematic way to the disposal of his per capita, always accomplishes more than the more brilliant drinker who is all shine and glitter, but who lacks the staying qualities necessary to compete in these days of large operations.

Inspiring indeed is the sight of a member of the Epworth League or the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, as she rises to take her morning or evening per capita. Her efforts are humble, but without her the balance of special heavy brew "Export" would be on the wrong side of the ledger, and we could not hold our head up among the nations of the earth.

Did you ever think, as you decided that your daily allowance would be four cents and a fraction's worth of imported cognac, what a wise provision the statistician is? Without him we could never know when we could have another, nor would we know when it was proper to leave a little in the cask for form's sake. Without him, who, when he is without a shelter, could draw the per capita coverlets over his head, and thank heaven that the per capita increase of roof was so great that he now had forty-two more square inches than he had five years ago? It is so very consoling when the pavements are cold. Try it once and see how gratifying it is.

Then when you have done that, take the per capita glass from the per capita shelf, and fill yourself a per capita dram. As you sit before the blazing logs in the gas stove, and reflect that during this generation there has been a per capita increase of 72 per cent in the amount of coal mined, you can look back with contempt at your barbaric ancestors who had nothing but an ax and a forest from which to draw their fuel. As the potent elixir of Kentucky plays its merry music on your heart strings, and you reach for the biscuit, does it not exalt you to think that there has been a marvelous increase in the per capita increase of wheat? Have another biscuit on the strength of it, and also indulge in a little glace fruit, the per

capita increase of which has been 9 per cent in ten years. Really, you may as well have your share.

You say that if there has been an increase in the amount of clothing, shoes, food, and buildings, your clothes are full of holes, and your coat is easily pierced by the wind? Ah, but there is a large amount of atmosphere that must be distributed, per capita. Perhaps you are taking too much. Some of the things, you know, are statistical and oratorical atmosphere, and you may be in the draught. But it is un-American to complain. Be a man. Stand up before the world and tell all nations that yours is the greatest nation—on the per capita basis—on the face of the globe. Show to them what the per capita increase has been, and do not mind such a little thing as want. You have some part of everything in your humble, per-capital way, and that should satisfy you, unless you are beyond all hope and reason.

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