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EDITORIAL

DR. ELIOT'S LEAKS.

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DR. CHARLES W. ELIOT, having obtained a court order prohibiting a competitor from using his name to advertise a certain five-foot shelf of books, should now do the same to protect his theory on the cost of living. It surely is unique enough to warrant protection of some sort.

Dr. Eliot's theory, conveyed in a letter just published, to a Boston manufacturer, is that labor is responsible for "a large proportion of the increase in the cost of living" inasmuch as union rules "cause great waste of time," and hence "rob the consumer."

Dr. Eliot's theory has several leaks. The first one is that, due to the job-trust policy of the American pure-and-simple unions, only some 2,000,000 out of the 10,000,000 or so wage workers in the country are organized. Being kept outside of the unions, the vast majority of the workers of the country can not be blamed for what the little A.F. of L.-ized minority may do.

Leak no. 2 is that even where they are in force, union rules cause no "great loss of time." What they do, when they in fact accomplish anything that looks that way, is to give the otherwise too intensely worked employes a chance for a breathing spell and a rest. Or else, to follow another point of Dr. Eliot's, due to jurisdictional demarcations they cause the work to be distributed among various crafts, and may cause delays in making the transfer. The first is not a "waste" in any sense of the word, except to the exploiter who would rather lose a back tooth than see his employe not covered with dollar-dripping sweat. The second may be a "waste," but it is caused not by the workmen, but by the employer, who refuses to hire a large enough force to handle the work smoothly, and who encourages jurisdiction rivalries as a means of keeping the working class divided against itself.

Leak no. 3 is that with all the "union rules," "limitation of output," "ca' canny"

and “waste of time” the workers have been able to enforce—which in spite of Dr. Eliot’s and Square Deal Post’s asserverations is very slight indeed—wages have only risen 19 percent in the last twenty years, while the cost of commodities has increased 60 per cent. Who or what is responsible for the other 41 per cent.?

Leak no. 4, and the most fatal one of all, is that “union rules,” wages, and all the rest of it have very little to do with the price of commodities. The quoted price of an article on the market bears no necessary relation to what it cost the manufacturer to get it produced for him. To be sure, every employer will be only too glad to use a raise in wages enforced upon him by his work people as an excuse for raising if possible the price of his goods. But no one ever yet saw an employer voluntarily lower his prices because he had browbeaten his employes into accepting a lower wage. What decides in both instances is the state of the market, and that in the long run depends on the ultimate controlling factor, the amount of socially necessary labor power embodied in the article. That is the basis upon which commodities exchange; be the wages in one case twice as high as in the other, it will not affect the exchange value of the product. What it will affect is the amount of profit retained by the employer, or, if he be hard-pinched enough, it may mean his driving out of business—to the joy and benefit of his competitors.

Dr. Eliot’s theory is leaky, very leaky. It needs protection badly.

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