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FIRST EDITORIAL

That Per Capita

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At a time when the gorgeous Bradley Martin ball was casting its shadow before it, and within the very week when that displayful event took place, the *New York Times* appeared with an article entitled “The Progress of Thirty Years,” arguing that “the whining and grumbling among the American people in these days” was groundless, and seeking to prove the point with statistics. Its statistics are to this effect:

“In 1867 the money in the country was \$20.11 per capita; in 1896 it was \$32.86—an increase affluence of \$12.75 per inhabitant;” and much more to the same purpose.

The deceptiveness of “averages” as a measure of prosperity has long been demonstrated. If in a room there are 100 people, 1 of whom has \$1,000, and the remaining 99 have \$1 apiece, the average wealth in the room would be \$10.99. Yet the fraud upon the intellect of pointing to this amount as an indication of the financial status of each person in that room is palpable. Of this nature are the “averages” that capitalist official political economy revels in. The *Times*’ average, coming together with the Bradley Martin ball, puts in hand a club with which to cave in the skull of the fraud.

The amount of money that the Bradley Martin ball has cost is variously estimated; the lowest figure is \$500,000. The number of people—hostess and guests—whose aggregate expenses foot up this grand total, is at the utmost 250. On an average, these people must have spent \$2,000 a piece. Let us contemplate the fact.

The per capita of money in the country is \$32.86; the 250 Bradley-Martin-Ballers, each of whom had \$2,000, must have been each in possession of at least \$1,967.14 more than his “per capita” entitled him to, or an amount almost equal to the “per capita” of 60 other “per capita holders.” To bring out these facts is equivalent to demonstrating three principles worth memorizing:

First—In so far as the “average” or “per capita” argument implies that a certain amount of wealth is ACTUALLY ENJOYED by each and every citizen, it suggests an

unqualified falsehood. The Bradley Martin ball furnished undeniable evidence that, in this instance alone, an amount of enjoyment, equivalent to at least the aggregate “per capita” or “average” enjoyment of 15,000 inhabitants, was confiscated by 250 other people.

Second—In so far as the “average” or “per capita” argument implies that a certain amount of wealth ACTUALLY BELONGS to each and every citizen, it points the finger to the fact that the working class is robbed by the capitalist class. The Bradley Martin ball furnishes undeniable evidence that, in this instance alone, an amount equal to at least the aggregate “per capita” or “average” of 15,000 inhabitants was in the pockets of only 250 other people.

Third—The working class supports the capitalist class in life and in luxury. The Bradley Martin ball was paid with moneys that of right belong to at least 15,000 people who were not there, and were not allowed in.

Thanks are due to the *Times* for having trotted out the capitalist “per capita” fraud at a time so seasonable to knock it down and illustrate sound Socialist economics.

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

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