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EDITORIAL

A SORE SPOT EXPOSED.

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IT would be edifying to hold the noses of the praise-singers of the capitalist system, as the “only social system that keeps society abreast of mechanical achievements,” to the hard facts revealed by the conduct of the New York Central Railroad corporation in the matter of the Park avenue tunnel.

The tunnel in question is an unqualified nuisance, both to the tenants of the residences that line the avenue under which it runs, and to the enormous number of passengers conveyed through it. Hundreds of trains run both ways daily through the tunnel. It is the ingress and egress of the New York Central, not alone, but also of the New York, Hew Haven and Hartford Railroad and of the New York and Harlem line. What with the narrowness of the tunnel, the inadequate means of ventilation and the smoke from the numerous locomotives passing through on its four tracks, the atmosphere in the tunnel is suffocating, not infrequently even fetid. The discomfort to the passengers is intense, while escaping through the round holes overhead, a stench infests the street above, and invades the contiguous houses.

Surely here is an evil. The praise-singers of capitalism, affecting scientific calmness, often admit the existence of evils in modern society, but they vault over these with the argument that such evils are only “one side of the medal;” the other side of the medal is some great good that counterbalances the evil and by the aid of which “the human race can enjoy enjoyments not otherwise attainable, and reach heights of civilization from which the savage is excluded.” It is obvious that another argument is implied in such reasoning, to wit, the argument that the “enjoyments” and “heights of civilization” thus attained could not be attained except at the price of the ills that are admitted. It is also significant that this argument is generally implied only: somehow, the St. Pauls of Capitalism eschew the mentioning of it: they positively run away from it. The conduct of the New York Central corporation furnishes a timely illustration of the why of such eschewing and running away; it thus helps to detect a certain leprous spot of the capitalistic social scheme.

All the evils complained of to-day in connection with the tunnel are removable, and the benefit of that great artery of traffic would remain unaffected. The evil proceeds solely from the use of steam as the propelling power. Substitute electricity as the propelling power in the tunnel and the evils are remedied. Electric motors are available. Why does not the New York Central make the change of motive power in the tunnel? There is the rub. It is false that capitalism keeps society abreast of mechanical achievements.

Every mechanical achievement crystallized into capital becomes a means for grinding out profit. The money invested in it must be pulled out; it must yield all that lies in it. Let the best improvement be devised, society will be kept, not abreast, but behind it, because the only ones, capable under capitalism, of bringing society abreast of it refuse. They refuse because such change would mean a forfeiture of what there may yet be squeezed out of the old contrivance, besides the expenditure to boot of what the new contrivance would cost. Capital is not there for the benefit of the race; it is there for the benefit of the one who holds it, and that means that it is there at the expense of the race. Hence the New York Central corporation makes mountains out of mole-hills in the excuses for not making the change.

When the capitalistic praise-singers talk about “the other side of the medal,” in other words, when they run away from the direct statement that the evils attending their plants or system are inevitable, they do so because such bald statement would point out its own refutation, and the refutation would draw attention to facts that indicate that, under the Capitalistic system mechanical improvements are blighted, while under the Socialist system the race would immediately have at its disposal a large number of inventions that to-day are kept under lock and key because their application would interfere with the private capitalist’s private interests.

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

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