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EDITORIAL

THEY NOW CALL IT “WINNETKA.”

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A FEW years ago every freak in the land was shouting “Initiative and Referendum.” The “Initiative and Referendum” was to be the panacea for all social ills. Indeed, it was huckstered about in regular patent medicine style: warranted to cure after one or two applications. The craze lulled, and finally was heard of but little. It is now up again. Like all crazes, this one now turns up under a new name: the “Winnetka System.” At all points it is the same old corpse, only re-rigged in fresh furbelows. It may seem tiresome, it is instructive all the same to re-submit such crazes to the scalpel, every time they reappear. Being plausible absurdities their exposure serves the purpose of rectifying thought; being vicious conceits the squelching of them serves the purpose of clearing the path of rubbish.

The germ of truth that makes the “Initiative and Referendum,” alias “Winnetka System,” plausible is the truism that the people should rule themselves; the germ of falsehood that makes the thing vicious is the suggestion of mystical powers in the suffrage and the form in which it is exercised. Plausibility and mysticism shaken up together produce a fetid compound. So in this case.

The ballot is a form of civilized discussion among masses. It is all that, but it is not more. There is, accordingly, in the ballot no more intelligence than in the person who casts it. The “Initiative,” etc., alias “Winnetka System,” implies a denial of this cardinal truth. It attributes to the ballot, cast in a certain way, occult powers; starting upon such foundation, the “Winnetka System,” alias “Initiative,” etc., reaches a series of preposterous conclusions, which schemers, always acting upon an unerring instinct, quickly seize upon, and seek to turn to the Capitalist use of turning the Labor Movement away.

Whatever is true and useful in the “Winnetka System,” alias “Initiative and

Referendum" is now in full operation. The annual, in many cases semi-annual elections in the land, are, in that respect, essential "Winnetkas." What does the "Winnetka" propose? That laws shall not be passed without the consent of the citizens: a proposed law is submitted to the voters: if approved it passes, if disapproved it is rejected. What essential difference is there between that and our present elections? He who has ears to hear, or eyes to see, can, at every election, hear and see the question: "Citizens are you satisfied with the laws that have been passed? If you are, vote back into power the parties that have passed such laws; if you are not satisfied, vote them down and out." It is mysticism of the most vicious nature to imagine that people, the ears and eyes of whose intellects are so stopped that they will regularly answer the above question in the affirmative by voting back into power the parties who have uniformly legislated bad laws, will suddenly have ears and eyes clear enough to vote with greater intelligence upon the laws themselves. It is this vicious mysticism that brands all "Winnetkas" as mischievous; it is this their mischievous feature that renders them permanently attractive to the crooks.

Obviously, it is not the method of voting that needs and deserves the attention of honest men. What needs and deserves their individual attention is the method of clearing the sight and hearing of the voters. Then, "Winnetkas" or no "Winnetkas," suffrage or no suffrage, the citizens would quickly and effectively enough sweep bad laws, together with their breeders, into the political and social scrap-heap.

It is by reason of this very fact that "Winnetkas" periodically bob up. Their purpose is to draw attention and energy, away from the path that leads to results, into the paths that lead to quagmires. Accordingly, it is no wonder that all "Winnetkas" come accompanied with such mischievous stupidities as "non-partisanship": every man, unless fit for the lunatic asylum, is a "partisan": to be a "partisan" is to have a "purpose": who but idiots act purposelessly? Accordingly, it is no wonder that the Hannaized American Federation of Labor, with its scabby Tampa deputy sheriffs, its scabby check-off system, its raft of scabby decoy-duck placemen in the capitalist Government, carefully avoids filling its printed space with educational matter, that would clarify the minds of the workers on the workings of the capitalist system. If it did that, it would be aiding the work of teaching the workers how to use the ballot they now hold and snare their capitalist

fleecers under an avalanche of votes, and rear the Socialist Republic. Instead, it prints thick “supplements” with “Winnetka System” slush. The space, taken up in a man’s mind with slush, is not available for sense.

What new name will the lure take next?

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

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