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EDITORIAL

SOCIALISM—POLITICAL.

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OFTEN, speaking of affairs in America, the student of the American Labor Movement qualifies his statements with the observation, “whatever other course European conditions may dictate there.” One thing and another happening in France, in Germany and now in Russia—and many more are about to follow—are pointing to the fact that the inroads of capitalism in those countries will compel there a change in Socialist tactics, and that the Movement there will have to take its cue from America—the country whose Working Class is expertest in capitalist conditions. Although the changes contribute arguments in support of the soundness of the firmly maintained principle of the Socialist Labor Party, that a posture of imitation toward Europe is not only absurd, but harmful to the international Movement, the facts that these changes throw up are valuable to us in America in many ways. For one thing, the knowledge of inferior formations, especially in their struggle of development, is inestimable to the proper understanding of the superior ones; for another thing, and to us, at this season, most important of all, the rank and file of the Labor Movement in America is to so great an extent, and to its injury, dazzled by the froth of the Socialist vote abroad, that they are prone to slide down from the eminence of their own experience, and look for models from the inferior experience of our comrades on the European Continent. Despite all our American superior experience, furnished us by American capitalism, we here have been so steadily dragged down by Europe that we still are in the process of building—witness the Chicago Manifesto, together with the vast amount of misconceptions that the Manifesto, it is to be hoped, is an intelligent attempt at disentangling the Socialist Movement from. The most recentest fact that should be of interest to us, thrown up by European events, is the passage in the Czar’s proclamation in which he warns his revolted workingmen subjects on strike

“not to affiliate with a movement that is not confined to economic aspirations.” The warning should have a familiar ring to the American ear; a ring, however, the essence of which many have missed, and that has led to a distressing confusion of thought. Upon some, the warning has had the effect of attributing an undue importance to the political movement, and that has generally been accompanied with more or less contempt for and neglect of the economic organization; with others, at the opposite extreme, the warning, coupled with the experience of the enervating influence of parliamentarism, besides the unreliability of the polls, has superinduced a concentration of energy upon what they call “revolutionary Trades Unionism” with its inevitable accompaniment of disregard for the political organization. Between these extremes there are all manner of shades.—In other words, the American Labor Movement, furnished by capitalist society with all the bones necessary for the skeleton of its anatomy, finds itself to-day dislocated. These bones have to be set.

The political movement of Socialism is the focused rays of the class-conscious economic movement.

Socialist science, like biology, or natural sciences in general, does not concern itself about the cause of the laws it has to deal with; it concerns itself solely with ascertaining the laws. There are three sociologic laws applicable to the question, all the three unquestionable:

1st. The hustings is the field of first encounter;

2d. Right without Might is illusory; in other words, the field of physical force is an unavoidable court of second and last resort;

3d. He who can not vote right ever will shoot wrong.

These three laws settle the unavoidableness of Political Socialism, that is, of the political organization—and not a few or slight are the conclusions that flow therefrom.

No sane man, unless he is after personal political preferment to be reached by cajoling workingmen’s votes, will entertain any illusions on the integrity of the capitalist agencies at the polls in the handling of the ballots of revolutionary Socialism. The conduct of the Southern Bourbons, and the resulting Civil War are events too fresh on the public mind. At the same time, no thinking man will deny

that a mass-vote against capitalism—whether actually cast and counted out, or whether wrongfully kept from being cast—will have fulfilled all the requirements, in spirit and in letter, of the sociologic law that decrees the hustings as the first court of trial. Both parties to the action will be thoroughly aware of the fact. The Working Class will know itself triumphant; the Capitalist Class will know itself defeated; and the fact will have been ascertained by the methods of civilization. The moral strength thereby imparted to the one, the moral weakness thereby inflicted upon the other are essential pleadings in the court of physical force, or of appeal, whither the defeated usurper, driven to drop the mask of legality, is, in his headlong rage, bound to summon the victor.

The mission of the political organization of Socialism comes to an end with the abandonment of the political field by Capitalism. If the Socialist Movement is not a dislocated body, the instant its political arm has been rendered unnecessary, the arm of the economic organization comes into play. If, however, the Socialist Movement is dislocated, then the tide will recede—to be re-formed in ways impossible to predict, but that the course of the Roman proletariat of old may give some inkling of.

In the last analysis the issue of Political Socialism will depend in America upon the conduct of Economic Socialism—upon the Trades Union—and its conduct will, in turn, hinge upon the success achieved by Socialism in the economic organization of the Working Class. So long as the term “Unionism” can apply, as it does to-day, to guild organizations—that is to say, to bodies whose very construction necessarily exclude the bulk of the Working Class—there can not be said to be any Economic Socialist organization in existence; and so long as that is the case Political Socialism will be weak, all the weaker for the birth that such conditions promote of more or less visionary, more or less freakish, more or less fraudulent caricatures of true Political Socialism, a distinctive feature of which caricatures is official disconnection from the economic organization and individual underground connections with the warring guilds.

The passage in Frank Bohn’s report of the conference that issued the Chicago Manifesto,—”This attitude (that the new economic organization is to be affiliated with no political party) on the political character of the proposed organization,

prevailed with a majority of the members of the conference, because it was thought that attention should just now be riveted upon the subject of re-organization upon the industrial field. ‘SOCIALISTS’ (the quotation marks are Bohn’s) NOT INTERESTED IN THE SUBJECT OF INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM ARE SUPPOSED TO REMAIN AWAY FROM THE JUNE CONFERENCE”—seems to denote a perfect comprehension of the situation by the conference. The passage seems to indicate, on the one hand, that the conference attaches all the importance that the subject merits to the close union of Political Socialism with Economic Socialism, without which the former is moon-shine; and, on the other hand, that it is clear upon the reverse of the medal, to wit, that Political Socialism, inevitable in the premises, is an impossibility without Economic Socialism is able to emit the full class-rays of the truly united Working Class, without which the latter has no place in the Labor Movement and is but a wheel in the mechanism of Capital.

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