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EDITORIAL

CHILD LABOR IN GEORGIA.

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ANOTHER skirmish has been fought in the South between Fancy and Facts. The Assembly of the State of Georgia has put through a child-labor bill limiting the ages to fourteen for night-work, twelve for factory work for children in general, and ten for orphans and children supporting aged or disabled parents. Seeing that similar worthless bills have been enacted into law by other cotton-raising and now manufacturing States, to hang in their respective capitols like rusty mail in monumental mockery for flies to roost upon, it is quite probable that the Georgia Assembly bill will also pass the Senate, that the Governor will sign it, and that it will become law. The Georgia Assembly bill marks the latest compromise in the struggle in the South between unbalanced Morality and on-all-fours Materialism, such as capitalism breeds and demands.

The struggle of the capitalist class in the South to get its “sea legs” has re-enacted during this generation in America the grewsome scenes depicted by Marx in his sketch of the rise of capitalism in England. The child was the most pitiful of the many pitiful victims in Yorkshire and Lancashire. Magistrates and front-pew holders vied with one another in the effort to capitalize the blood of infants. It was so in the American Northern mill towns and continued to be so, openly, brazenly, until wealth enough was gathered to somewhat let up and to put on the external appearance of some degree of decency. The South, long held back, has since the Civil War entered the field of manufacture. With her appearance on the field, the scenes, once enacted in the North and before then in England, have re-appeared on her sunny territory. Magistrates and front-pew holders have there also been in a race that tramples under foot the most defenceless of all capitalist victims—the child.

During this period the Moral Sense has asserted itself, as it did everywhere

else, only to butt its head against the material needs of the capitalist. Attempts at establishing child-labor regulations were made time and again, only to be rebuffed, not infrequently with quotations from the Bible, usually with political stump speeches. Finally the Carolinas passed a bill of the futile nature of the present one in Georgia, other Southern States imitated the example finding it a harmless concession to sentiment, and now Georgia falls in line.

The enactment of these bills in the South—for that matter, it is not materially different in the North—is not a “move out of the wilderness.” These bills are but candles burned to the St. Michael of Morality, and intended only to afford vaster opportunities for the worship of his Dragon. Capitalism’s needs—its “thrift,” its “industry,” its “cleverness”—compel the ethics of cannibalism. The latest proof of the pudding is found in the Georgia Assembly bill which patentizes child-labor in the year 1906, said to be “of grace,” and in which wealth is producible in such vast quantities that the child could, at last, enjoy a vacation.

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

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