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EDITORIAL

SOCIALISM AT HOMESTEAD.

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A SPECIAL correspondent of the *New York Tribune*, provided by his chief with the finest pair of capitalistic spectacles that the successor of Horace Greeley could find in his stock of humbugological instruments, has investigated the condition of affairs at Homestead. His report, published in last Monday's issue of that paper, covered nine columns, including three columns of figures concerning wages and retail prices. Most of it is a comprehensive rehash of statements previously made in the capitalist press throughout the country. Its obvious purpose is to spread the idea that the Carnegie Company has been woefully misrepresented and misunderstood; that its object was not to reduce but rather to increase the actual "earnings" of its men, by increasing the output through the use of new machinery to an extent which would more than compensate them for the contemplated reduction of their "wages", that this could not be done so long as the labor of the mill was under the control of the Amalgamated Association of Ironworkers, and that the Carnegie Company had therefore to lock out its men in order to compel them to leave the union and be happier than they ever were.

It were time lost for us, Socialists, to consider and expose this fallacy. What we view in labor struggles is not the special cause of dispute in each case, or the immediate object of the parties engaged, but the general tendencies and lessons of such struggles; and we should, therefore, pass unnoticed the elaborate production of the *Tribune* correspondent were it not for his general conclusions, which are highly suggestive, coming as they do from such a source.

After an awkward attempt to explain the difference between the socialistic character of labor organization in Europe and the heretofore "pure and simple" trade unionism of America—an attempt in which he shows a lamentable ignorance of labor history—the writer in question observes more intelligently:

“But Socialism, ever on the alert for an opportunity to advance its doctrines, has at last obtained a strong foothold in labor organizations in America, and it has seized upon the Homestead trouble as one of its opportunities. While it is undeniably true that there may be but few, or, indeed, not any pronounced Socialists among the locked-out men at Homestead, it is equally true that the influence of socialism has been brought to bear upon the situation through outside organizations in which the socialistic element is potent, if not predominant. In this and other ways the Homestead trouble has marked an era in the history of organized labor in America.”

This is the most impressive generalization that has yet appeared in the capitalistic press since the Homestead battle inaugurated that series of conflicts in the course of which the use of all the public powers was freely granted to our law-breaking class of corporate capitalists for the enforcement of their despotism.

In the same manner as Socialism—by the logic of events, we must say, far more than through any direct pressure exerted by the Socialists themselves—has progressed in Homestead to the extent of drawing from men heretofore very conservative the thoroughly socialistic declaration that “labor has an inalienable right of ownership and employment in the industries of its creation”, it is at this time progressing at Buffalo and in Tennessee, and from those centres of open disturbance it is radiating throughout the land.

And while the conviction is spreading among the disinherited masses that the railroads, the mines, the iron works, all the industries of the country belong of right to the people in common, they begin also to see, in the flash of the public bayonets arrayed on the side of their despoilers, that their only means of achieving their emancipation is a strike at the ballot box for the possession of the public powers.

What this possession involves is made plain enough by the *Tribune* correspondent himself in the following reference to the fact that the local government of Homestead is in the hands of the locked-out men, and to the inevitable consequences of this fact in the near future, not to speak of the past. We quote:

“The non-union men cannot always be housed and fed within the mill inclosure. It is too much like imprisonment. By and by they will come out into the town of Homestead. There will be no militia there to protect them.

One by one the non-union men will be driven out of the town by violence. Others will become frightened and go away voluntarily. It will be almost impossible for the company to keep a full complement of imported men at work in its mammoth plant. The local officers of the law being union men, will, as they have already done, close their eyes to violations of the law.”

This, of course, is not the condition of affairs that Socialists desire. Nor is it the condition of affairs that would prevail at Homestead if the workingmen of Pennsylvania extended to their State, by electing their own Governor, Legislature and judges, the principle of self-government applied on a limited and purely municipal scale by their Homestead brothers. Much less would it be the state of affairs that would prevail there or anywhere if the workingmen of the whole country applied that principle to the nation by electing their own President and a majority of the United States Congress. Then, indeed, and then only, with all the public powers in the hands of those to whom they rightly belong, would effect be given in full to the declaration of the Homestead men, that “Labor has an inalienable right of ownership and employment in the industries of its creation.” Then, and then only, would the “right to labor” mean something else than the right of unemployed men to displace the employed under the protection of bayonets. Then, and then only, would all workers be brothers, and peace reign in the midst of plenty.

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