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EDITORIAL

HEAT AND MACHINERY.

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“In the development of the natural resources of the earth, it is necessary for men to combine both their capital and their energy. Railroads, steamship lines, great steel plants, and workshops of every kind can only be created by a combination of capital.”—President Baer, before the Arbitration Commission, Philadelphia, Feb. 12, 1903.

THE story is ever quoted, as a sign of the mental petrification of the Chinese, that, for a long time, whenever they wanted roast pork, they burnt down a house. The Chinese, being as yet unacquainted with the roast pork delicacy, one day a house burnt down. A pig happened to be inside. When the fire was over, the pig was found roasted to a turn. John Chinaman tasted the thing, and found it was good. Thereupon, whenever he wanted roast pork, he took a pig, tied it in a house, and set the house on fire. He was unable to distinguish the incidental accompaniment from the essential. Is President Baer’s intellectual make-up, as photographed above by himself, of higher or different grade? Not a bit!

The natural resources of the earth are to-day developed; railroads, steamship lines, great steel plants and workshops of every kind are to-day created by a combination of capital. But the “capital” ingredient is as incidental and unessential to the final result as the “burning down of a house” is to roast pig. The permanent and essential ingredient to roast pig is HEAT, and the requisite heat can be generated in other and less wasteful ways than by burning down a house. Likewise in the matter of developing the natural resources of the earth. The permanent and essential ingredient thereto is MACHINERY, and the requisite machinery can be set in operation in other and less wasteful ways than by turning it into capital.

What is CAPITAL? Capital is that improved and ever more improving machinery or tool of production, essential to the development of the natural resources of the earth,

and HELD IN PRIVATE HANDS. Private ownership is an essential feature of capital. Without “private ownership” in the machinery, in the plants of production, there is no “capital.” Obviously, “private ownership” is as unessential to the machinery of production as a “house on fire” is to the heat requisite for roast pig. It so happens that “private ownership,” that is to say, the “capital” feature is found, to-day, attached to the machinery of production; but just so was the “burnt house” feature at a time attached to the heat requisite for roast pork;—no less and no more so.

Nor yet does the parallel end there. It is not only in point of incidentality and unessentialness that the old “burnt house” feature of the heat, used in the production of roast pork, coincides with the modern “capital” feature of the machinery used in the development of the natural resources of the earth. The two features coincide also in their clumsiness; in the injury they work; in short, in their barbarism. Roast pork is good for man. But is the game worth the candle, if the prerequisite is a conflagration? The race is assuredly no better off if the hand, that furnitures its stomach, unshelters its head. Identically so with the “capital” feature, that to-day accompanies the machinery of production. “Railroads, steamship lines, great steel plants, and workshops of every kind” are good for man. But is that game worth the candle, if the prerequisite shall be a system of ownership that burns the house over our heads? The race is assuredly no better off if the very hand, that develops the natural resources of the earth, reduces the masses of the earth’s inhabitants to the level of coolies. In seeking to justify “capital” the way he did, President Baer correctly placed himself, and, along with himself, the class he speaks for, on record as not above the intellectual and moral level of the house-burning Chinaman pig-roaster.

But the world moves. Even in China, roast pork not longer has for its accompaniment “burnt down houses.” In America, led by the Torch of Civilization that the Socialist holds aloft, the machinery of wealth production will be scraped clean of the slime of “capital,” that now covers it all over, and the “natural resources of the earth will be developed” for the uplifting and not the degradation of the race.

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