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EDITORIAL

OBVERSE AND REVERSE.

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THE Vancouver, B.C., *Western Clarion* has from J.H. Hawthornthwaite, a Socialist party member of Parliament, an interesting article against the Industrial Workers of the World as its objective point. The article is refreshingly frank. As a rule, the political Socialist objectors to the I.W.W. conceal their objection to Unionism itself; not infrequently they even affect warm love and affection for Unionism, only it must not be “Socialist Unionism.” When, in order to reach the real issue in a controversy, the mask behind which it hides the head and front of its offending must be torn aside, the purity of the discussion is materially impaired. It becomes both tangled and acrimonious. Mr. Hawthornthwaite sails behind no mask. He admits that he is against all form of Unionism, contending that, whatever their form, Unions are all essentially alike—economically defective, sociologically false, consequently, have no legitimate standing in the solution of the Social Question. The issue is thus presented in all its purity.

With so exceptionally frank an adversary it would be manifestly unbecoming to insist on obvious slips, such obvious slips as the use of the term “Iron law of wages” as an acknowledged principle of Socialist economics. The “Iron law of wages,” especially quoted in quotation marks, is a technical term that Socialist economics have rejected. It is a Lassalleian principle that proceeds from wrong premises and arrives at wrong conclusions. Marxism knows no “Iron law of wages.” With this point rectified, merely for the sake of keeping the record clear, what Mr. Hawthornthwaite obviously means is the Marxian law of value, with its corollary the law of wages. Obviously proceeding from that sound economic principle, Mr. Hawthornthwaite correctly asks the question, How, then, can the Trades Union determine wages? Of course, it can not. It might as soon try to reach the moon with its hands as expect to accomplish such a result. Such an endeavor is admittedly

absurd, too absurd for discussion. Trades Unions can not determine wages. Hence they are impotent; worthless, to-day. So far so good. Mr. Hawthornthwaite, however, goes further. From these premises he leaps to the conclusion that, therefore, Industrial Unionism, the I.W.W., is equally worthless. In this leap the gentleman trips and falls. He seems not to realize that, in the leap, he does one of two things:—

Either incur a non-sequitur by leaping at a conclusion from incomplete premises;

Or arrive at a correct conclusion, from full premises, but then, knock out, not the I.W.W. only, but all political parties of Socialism as well, that is, all aspiration to overthrow the wages system.

The conclusion that the I.W.W. is as worthless as Trades Unionism, can be arrived at only by accepting as standard, not SOME, but ALL the premises, stated and implied, from which Trades, or craft, or pure and simple Unionism proceeds. Pure and simpledom proceeds from capitalist premises. The capitalist principle is that the law of value, applied to labor-power, is a natural law, “natural” in the capitalist sense of “inevitable.” It follows from this that human effort, and inevitably along with it, human beings, the workingman, are, must be, and can not choose but be merchandise. In a nutshell, capitalism, and pure and simpledom look upon the “wages system” as upon the solar system—an institution, which, to overthrow, it is visionary for man to attempt. Such a principle establishes a perfect working theory for the Capitalist, who sticks to it logically at every step, and thrives thereby. The theory, however, works disaster to the workingman: The efforts of the pure and simple or Trades Unionist to resist the disaster throw him into an absurd posture, the posture of seeking to avoid the inevitable consequences of his own deliberate act. Pure and simple Unionism stands with its foot in its own mouth. It upholds the tree of the wages system, and yet winces at its fruits. Such a posture, were it not so tragic, would be laughable. If, indeed, the Trades Union premises, stated and implied, are standard, then the I.W.W. would be but another silly attempt to kick against pricks—but, then, EQUALLY SILLY WOULD BE ALL POLITICAL PARTIES OF SOCIALISM. No effort should be needed with the member of a Socialist party to prove to him that Socialism is no woolgatherers’ phantasy. The

reason it is no such phantasy overthrows the premises, stated and implied, of Trades Unionism; that same reason reveals the incompleteness of the premises from which Mr. Hawthornthwaite arrives at the conclusion that the I.W.W. is as worthless as any other form of Unionism.

The central-basic error of Trades Unionism is its solar system concept of the system of wage-slavery. From that central-basic error flow the scores of fatal principles and worse tactics, the praises of which the Gompers crew exalts in songs of prose and verse as "Genuine Unionism." From that central basic error flows the spectacle of a warring Working Class, divided between the "organized" and the "unorganized," and the still more distressing spectacle of the "organized" crafts warring with one another. To sum up the sums of Trades Union wretchedness, from that basic-central error flows the fact that all the advantage, latent in organization, is lost to the Working Class. The theory that the unemployed are the strike-breakers is a theory dear to the capitalist heart. Where that theory settles upon the mind, the bottom is knocked from under the mighty power of, and discredit is thrown upon organization. The obvious fact that, even if possible, it is next to impossible to bring all the wage slaves within "Organized Labor," serves as a cushion from which the ball, "strikes are broken by the unemployed," gathers impetus. "Why organize, if the strike-breakers are growing more numerous?"—such is the natural thought suggested, and intended by the capitalist to be suggested, by his theory regarding the function of the unorganized and unemployed in breaking strikes. Hence the noise the capitalist makes about his Farleys. The theory is false. Strikes are no more broken by the unemployed and unorganized than corpses are produced by undertakers. When the undertaker arrives upon the scene the corpse is there, ready for him to operate upon. When the unemployed and unorganized arrive upon the scene the corpse of a broken strike is there, ready for them to operate upon—and that corpse was produced by the kindred craft or Trades Unions, that, acting upon the basic-central error of pure and simple Unionism, continued at work; some, holding the fort for the capitalist, others, carting unemployed for him from the most distant four quarters of the compass. Socialists laugh with pity or scorn at those who, pointing at the present evil results of the Trust, would smash it. The Socialist can distinguish between qualities that are inherent and qualities that are

incidental. He can detect the fact that the Trust qualities that work evil are incidental, and will pass away with the changed system of ownership; he can detect the fact that the Trust qualities that work benefit are inherent and now latent, awaiting the hour, when the counteracting influence will cease, to assert their beneficent influence. The Socialist is keen eyed enough to penetrate the bourgeois false reasoning regarding the Trust; he should be equally proof against the equally false reasoning of the capitalist—the roor-back about the unemployed and unorganized rendering the efforts of Unionism futile.

Identically with a party of Socialism, the central-basic principle of the I.W.W. is precisely the opposite of that of Trades or craft Unionism. The I.W.W. rejects the solar system concept of the system of wage slavery. The I.W.W. knows that the system of wage slavery is the work of man. What man has done man can undo. The I.W.W., accordingly, is in the field, expressly so, not to “determine wages,” but to end them—to end the system that condemns human beings to the status of merchandise, to be bought and sold in the market obedient to the merchandise law of value, and the laws that flow therefrom. As a consequence of its central-basic principle, the I.W.W. kindles the flame of Labor’s solidarity. Craft Unionism, by keeping the crafts apart, keeps apart the elements that are calculated, by merging together, to produce that flame. Organized Industrialism gets no corpse ready for those victims of capitalism, the unemployed, to operate upon as undertakers. Organized industrialism is to craft or pure and simple Trades Unionism what the people-owned Trust will be to the present Capitalist Class-owned concerns.

How arduous the educational work of the Socialist is, Mr. Hawthornthwaite’s condemnation of the I.W.W., along with all other forms of Unionism, furnishes a striking illustration of. The press of the capitalist, together with all his other agencies of education, craft Unionism among the lot, have so long filled the air that even men, who to a great extent have emancipated themselves from the domination of capitalist thought, are frequently seen insensibly to act obedient thereto. It is so with Mr. Hawthornthwaite. For one thing, so completely have the capitalist agencies filled the air with their definition of “Unionism” that the gentleman seems to be overpowered with the capitalist-wrought terms upon the subject. By what other theory can be explained that passage in Mr. Hawthornthwaite’s argument

against the I.W.W. where he speaks of the “universal strike” as a weapon to enforce the demand for—what?—“a higher wage”! As well say that the Russian people, now in general revolt against despotism, are seeking “to enforce the demand for fewer stripes with the knout of the Tsar’s executioners.” When the day, for which the I.W.W. expressly is drilling its forces, will have come for it to act as a whole, the demand will not be “to enforce a higher wage,” the cry will be to destroy the wage system. This is the obverse of Mr. Hawthornthwaite’s frame of mind. For another thing, and illustrative of the reverse of the gentleman’s mind, so completely have the capitalist agencies filled the air with the notion that politics are all sufficient to enforce the people’s will that Mr. Hawthornthwaite is overpowered by that false conception also, and he rejects all form of Unionism. He fails to penetrate the fact that politics alone can enforce “reforms” only. He is blind to the teaching of history, together with all the contemporaneous incidents that go to confirm that teaching, to the effect that class revolutions must be banked upon economic organization. This is pre-eminently the case with the pending Social Revolution, the culminating one of all previous revolutions. However revolutionary the Socialist political organization, it will be but a flash in the pan unless backed by the equally revolutionary economic organization. In America, wherever universal suffrage exists, the triumph of Labor is impossible without a political party; and, without the economic organization, the day of that party’s triumph would be the day of its defeat.

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