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EDITORIAL

ROOSEVELT AT CHICAGO.

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When we sweep aside the evidences of oratorical ability in Roosevelt's Labor Day speech at Chicago, there is nothing left but one or two bald, trite, flabby phrases which mean nothing in themselves, but which point to a great deal. The whole effusion is made up of the ideas which caught the trades' unionist in the past, and which are supposed to be still potent to catch them at the present time. It was a bid for votes—a prostration of intelligence, and an insult to every workingman who respects himself and his class.

When Roosevelt was serially inclined some few years ago he contrasted the workingman of the East with the cowboy of the West. In that contrast, he asserted that the cowboy was the mental, moral and physical superior of the workingman. When the story appeared in book form, Roosevelt was in the swing and the excitement of politics. New exigencies had arisen, and there was a call for circumspection, and care. The objectionable comparison was eliminated, and Roosevelt made his appearance as a friend of the Eastern workingman.

In Chicago, he pivots around that point, but his conclusion is different. The workingman is placed upon the same pedestal as that occupied by the cowpuncher alone. He is the peer of all, and on his sturdy shoulders rests the cause of humanity. He has his rights, when they do not interfere with the rights of capitalism. He has his duty to the state, and when the call comes, he should respond as a patriot. The well being of the nation is in his care, and Roosevelt looks to the discharge of this care as the only safeguard of our liberty and our prosperity.



THEODORE ROOSEVELT (1858-1919)

After ranging up and down the old song of prosperity of our beloved land, and the additional necessity forced upon us, the orator concludes by a blind appeal to his listeners to support the Republican ticket, and thus perpetuate the Republican rule, which is responsible for this happy condition of affairs.

The thousands of persons present, mostly workingmen, listened in silence to this insult to their class, or else, at given times, cheered in a perfunctory way. Republican domination held full sway in Chicago, despite the fact that there are thousands of men who feel the effects of the strike, and despite the fact that the men engaged in the meatpacking industry are on the rugged edge of desperation. They listened, and no word of protest indicated that they understood the import of what had been said. There was stolid indifference or cynical, morose silence when the glib tongue of the speaker poured forth the envenomed contempt that he feels for the wageworker.

The labor legislation which he proclaimed, as a bulwark of safety, and the valuable services of the Bureau of Labor Statistics must have aroused in some minds present the savage exultation that is felt when one views his enemy in a state of stupor and helplessness. Those who rejoiced were the ones who gained by such words as Roosevelt uttered. The labor leaders responsible for his presence, and the capitalists who paid the bills, had all good reason to be satisfied with the effects of the meeting. Their work was being done by an accredited henchman, and one who could forget his real sentiment, when it was a question of leading votes to the party he represented.

Roosevelt's claim to consideration as a man of intelligence is forever shattered by that Chicago speech. His claim to honest, fearless utterance is as nothing in the face of the dastardly crawl performed by him. He threw aside every one of his previous opinions, and hid from view the actions that made him most widely known. He was no longer the fighting, labor-scorning, labor-skinning, labor-clubbing Roosevelt. He was the friend of labor. The concern that he felt for it was too deep even for his tireless voice to say. He forgot his career as Governor of New York. He forgot the labor laws, which are now harmless curiosities. He forgot his attitude in the strikes, which have occurred here. He forgot his club, his words when Assistant Secretary of the Navy, relative to the uselessness of the average workingman. He remembered only that he was after votes, and that votes he must have at any price. The cheapest price a politician can pay for a vote is his honor and his honesty.

While Roosevelt spoke at Chicago, various other men of various degrees of

similarity spoke in other cities. They gave vent to the same sentiments in the same sort of a way. What they lacked in efficacy was due to their lack of training, or their lack of skill. They held their hearers in the same esteem in which Roosevelt held his. An honest man would have faced the assembled crowd and unhesitatingly declared that he valued them not at all. He was after their votes, and the only argument he would advance was that the same power, which inflicted him upon them as the speaker of the day, would drag their votes to the ballot box.

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

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