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EDITORIAL

THE “AUTOMOBILE ERA.”

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THE “Automobile” is the latest nostrum to be entered in the pharmacopoeia of fakir-led pure and simple Unionism. As readers of THE PEOPLE will have learned from the detailed report of the late convention of the Amalgamated Association of Street Railway Employees, it was there soberly proposed to handle and win strikes with the aid of automobiles. This may seem a silly proposition; there is no denying its silliness; and yet, over and above its silliness, the proposition tells a tale big enough for a volume.

The machine, perfected, improved—in short, concentrated Capital,—knocks out the workingman. It knocks him out from both sides:

In the first place, the more perfected the machine is, all the more complicated is its mechanism; and all the larger is the capital needed in its production. Consequently, the more improved the machine is, all the further is it out of the reach of the capital-less man. Improved machinery in private hands is a decree of slavery pronounced upon the Working Class;

In the second place, in the measure of its improvement, the privately owned machine displaces Labor. The improved machine in private hands is a decree of starvation pronounced upon the Working Class: large squads of men are thrown out of work, and thereby drag down those who are at work.

These features of Capital are not obvious, even to-day, to the average workingman; much less obvious were they when Capitalism was not yet what it is to-day. Not being obvious, the workers did not perceive that the execution capitalism was doing in their ranks was a result, not of the improved machine, but of its unimproved feature, its private ownership feature. Accordingly, the untutored, the class-unconscious workmen failed to adopt the course that would stop the execution; they failed to recognize the political aspect of the question; they failed, and very generally fail to-day, to strain for the overthrow of the system of private ownership and for the establishment of the Socialist system; as a result, they fall into the hands of ignorant leaders, who drill them in methods that are successively

silly and suicidal. The transition from method to method is a commentary on whither the Fakirs are drifting and have drifted to.

The first method was that of “Physical Force” applied to the death-dealing improved machine. This method bespeaks an era of revolutionary spirit. True enough, it betrays all the denseness of the bull, that, head-down, would stop a locomotive in full run; yet it tells of physical bravery. That was the first era.

The second method was quite a come-down. It was the “Paregoric Method.” It consisted in administering this laxative to “scabs.” It may also be termed the “Dempsey Method,” having been introduced by a “Labor Leader” of that name in the street railway strike at Pittsburg, about ten years ago. The denseness continues unabated; but the element of physical bravery is virtually eliminated; when the era of the “Paregoric Method” is reached, we have come down to the sneak.

The third method is the one now proposed by the Mahon “Labor Leader.” It is the “Automobile Method.” When a strike breaks out against street car lines, automobiles are to be procured by the strikers to carry passengers and thus beat Capital. When this stage is reached the denseness has vanished, and in lieu of the old physical bravery, or even the later “paregoric” sneak bravery, we have in full blast the DESERTER and TRAITOR: Furnish the automobile capitalists with sufficient blood-money and power to fleece the workers that the street railway companies now enjoy, and these may be beaten,—with Labor as the food for cannon, as usual.

The development of the “Labor Leader” is here portrayed. It runs down from the “Physical Force” era, when still some honesty clung to him, down to the “Automobile” era, via the “Paregoric” era, when the honesty vanishes in even step with the disappearance of bravery. When the present, or “Automobile” era, has been reached, we see nothing of the revolutionary fibre left; the deserter and traitor only is rampant.

Not for naught are the Labor Fakirs termed the Labor Lieutenants of Capitalism.

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

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