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EDITORIAL

GLEANINGS FROM CONGRESS— VESTIGES OF “STATE RIGHTS.”

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THE picture presented by the late Congressional debates is peculiarly interesting when examined from the side that may seem most completely political. Among the “political issues,” that early sprang up in the country, the issue of “State Rights” stands pre-eminent. From the start, that issue agitated the country, often convulsed it, and finally threatened its existence, until the crisis of the Civil War was successfully weathered. With the close of the Civil War the issue was settled. Nevertheless, like a receding thunder storm, its mutterings have not ceased. They still cause the social framework to vibrate. It could not be otherwise. The old issue of “State Rights,” being essentially a political reflex of economic substance, can not wholly vanish until the economic evolution, whose start the issue recorded, has been so completely revolutionized that the economic substance for the political reflex has wholly ceased to be. The country is now approaching that point. The economic evolution is now approaching the critical stage in the process of transforming industry from its former local (State Rights) into a national (National Rights) form. Accordingly, the “State Rights” issue, although unmentioned, was on the anvil during the late heated and protracted debates in Congress; and that, whether they were aware or not, was the red-hot iron that the political blacksmiths were hammering upon.

Needless to enlarge upon the historic-economic fact that the birth of the United States was the birth of capitalism in America. The economic fact reflected itself into a political form. Individual, “sovereign,” local production found its political expression in “State Sovereignty.” The “State Rights” principle sprang up as the consequence of “State Sovereignty.” To the bourgeois the principle seemed a “permanent principle.” Of course, it was not. Being the political superstructure of a

material-economic groundwork—a material-economic groundwork, at that, which was merely transitory—the “permanent principle” of “State Rights” was bound immediately to start shaking and trembling with every change due to the evolutionary process below. It did so shake and tremble, until, with a crash, it was riven beyond repair by the rapidly progressing economic evolution that precipitated the Civil War. The late protracted debates in Congress on the subject of the nation’s assumption of the right to regulate railroad rates, to inspect and label meat products, to superintend the purity of food, etc., etc., are loud premonitions of the next and final crash that completed economic evolution has in store for the now senile political principle of “State Rights.”

With the stream of immigration, that began pouring into the country immediately upon its independence, and that furnished the small bourgeois possessors with a ready-made proletariat, capitalist development moved apace. The development proceeded along the lines first, of the expansion of the originally small, individual capitalist undertakings beyond county and even State lines, secondly and later, along the lines of concentration. In this process the old New England town meetings speedily went overboard: whatever remained of them gradually lost its former significance; the next political principle and practice that began to totter was that of “State Rights.” The struggle over it was longer. The economic development did not push along all the existing capitalist undertakings with equal swiftness; moreover, new undertakings were constantly springing up, and they did not spring up abreast of those that already had reached greater maturity. Besides these forces, there were others that buttressed up the declining principle of “State Rights.” In many minds, theories often survive their cause. Regardless of the economic development that was undermining the theory of “State Rights,” many an intellectual liver in “the glories of the past” clung fatuously to the theory. The two forces—intellectual Rip Van Winkles and straggling capitalist concerns—combined, and together they locked horns with the force that made for the overthrow of the “State Rights.” Long and bitter though the conflict was its ultimate issue could not be a matter of doubt. Every year the material basis for the anti-“State Rights” forces widened and grew firmer, every year the material basis for the “State Rights” forces narrowed and lost in steadiness. The end came with the Civil War—that is, the end

of that heat in the race.

Deeply instructive is the fact that the end of the conflict, which had been raging up to then, speedily ushered in the revival of the same conflict, with this difference, that the sides changed. During the first period of the conflict the “State Rights” forces were the forces of small capitalism, the anti-“State Rights” forces were the forces of large capitalism; during the second period, the period we are now traversing, the forces of small production are the ones who demand “National Sovereignty,” while the forces of large production are seen to fall back upon the old “State Rights” for protection. It is a repetition upon the capitalist economic of the process that was seen upon the feudal economic field, when the barons, who had first gathered around the Crown against the minor landholders, having in time grown into virtual sovereigns, who eclipsed the Crown, sought to set themselves up independent of their sovereign, and when the minor economic forces, likewise forgetful of antecedents, rallied to the standard of the Crown with the pretence of “loyalty,” in fact, however, for the purpose of self-protection. To-day it is the shipping interests, greatly below the industries-owning and mine-owning railroad interests, that strain for Federal regulation of rates, while the railroad interests resist with arguments that are the economic versions of the old political arguments in favor of “State Rights.” To-day it is the colossal slaughter-house and meat-packing interests that protest against “Federal interference” in State affairs, that argue that it is the “prerogative of the State of Illinois” to pass and enforce sanitary laws, and they even threaten resistance—an exact echo of old Calhoun’s Nullification theory. Neither in this second struggle is the issue doubtful. The “State Rights” theory must and will down.

The present struggle is a supplemental continuation of the ante-Civil War struggle. The first epoch was marked by the struggle of the political aspect of the theory in even tempo with the sinking of its material basis; the present, or second, epoch is marked by the struggle of the actual political rulers to use their economic supremacy in such wise as to escape the consequences of their own full grown economic foundation. The first epoch was rounded up with the crash of the Civil War, which buried political “State Rights” under the ruins of small production; the second epoch will be rounded up with the crash of the Social Revolution, which will

establish the “National Rights” of the people in keeping with the present national character and function of industry. The revolution, started by the economic social system that gave birth to “State Rights,” will then be fully rounded. Individual production—the last vestige of the material foundation for “State Rights,” will then be buried under the ruins of individual ownership—the last social feature of “State Rights.”

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