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EDITORIAL

DARKENING COUNSEL.

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GIVEN a square inch of Castille soap, says Carlyle in his essay on Francia of Paraguay, to fill a bucket full of soapsuds is the task of but too many newspaper writers. If the article "The Truth About A.F. of L. Conservatism" by Louis Duchez in *The Call* of the 3rd of this month, were but five broad columns-fulls of soapsuds, churned from a bit of soap, it would be bad enough. But the article is infinitely worse than suds. It instills false facts and {is} promotive of false conclusions by means of still falser reasoning.

Left to settle, the suds of the article in question "precipitate" a sediment that may be condensed in these words:

"There has been no reaction on the part of the A.F. of L.; the A.F. of L. is what it substantially was; while modern invention and monopoly have invaded other fields of labor, they left the fields occupied by the A.F. of L. substantially untouched; the 'static psychology' of the A.F. of L. is the psychology dictated by the 'interests of the dying middle class'; hence, it follows that what holds the A.F. of L. together is the psychology of its original economic interests."

Both the allegations of fact and the conclusions are erroneous.

Even if it be true that tangible portions of the A.F. of L. still operate with primitive methods, it is not true that these portions are the "backbone" of the organization, or that modern "invention and monopoly" has not invaded the bulk of the body. It is idle for the article in question to set up a general principle, and immediately proceed to make such drastic exceptions as the miners and compositors. The fact is that modern "invention and monopoly" has invaded the bulk of the constituencies of the A.F. of L. Invention and monopoly invaded not mining and composition only; it invaded also glass-blowing, cigar-making, boiler-making, brewing, machinery making, traction operation, etc., etc., etc. All these

fields—a majority of the fields occupied by the A.F. of L.—are now run by up-to-date methods of invention. A.F. of L. constituencies, that labor upon these fields, continue to be as “conservative” as those constituencies that may yet be at the “middle class” stage. Identical with the posture of the A.F. of L. is the posture of the arch-reactionary railway Brotherhoods, the leading ones of which “invention and monopoly” has invaded with a vengeance. Seeing that these Brotherhoods, along with the A.F. of L. Unions, at work on fields that are in the grip of invention and monopoly, as well as those Unions whose field may still be free from the grip, join in holding the identical posture, it is obvious that the continued immunity, still enjoyed by some, can not be the cause of A.F. of L. psychology.

But there is worse in the article in question than the falseness of its premises. Vastly more harmful is the method of its reasoning.

The most mischievous system of reasoning is that which attributes causal powers to secondary or incidental circumstances. Such reasoning is mischievous because on the one hand, it tends to draw attention away from that on which the eye should be kept riveted, and which, if well grasped, leads to fruitful conclusions; and on the other hand, it draws attention to immaterial matters, the consideration of which, while it may tickle the palate of some minds by its seeming “cleverness,” tangles up, confuses thought, and leads to no constructive conclusions.

Truth is that which fits all the facts. What is that that is found in all the Unions—within and without the A.F. of L.,—and whether invaded or not by invention and monopoly, which, in the exact measure that they hold together, mark them unprogressive and anti-Socialist? What is that that is found in all these Unions? It is an INSURANCE ATTACHMENT, some sick and death benefit contrivance, of some sort or other, some treasury towards which dues have been contributed, and from which returns are expected in hours of need. Once dues are contributed towards such funds, two sentiments are set in motion. The first is the expectation of eventual “returns”; the other is the equally if not more potent dislike of forfeiting the dues, or rates, paid in. The two sentiments operate as two powerful bonds to hold the membership, even after the original reasons for joining the Union may have been abandoned. It goes without saying that such corrosively selfish and petty motives can not choose, on the one hand, but lower the tone of the Union

membership, and, on the other hand, awaken in the Labor Fakir's breast a special interest in the organization. On the same principle that the capitalist pets, placed in charge of the capitalist philanthropic establishments, are the chief beneficiaries, the Labor Fakir becomes the chief beneficiary of such Unions—he has his benefit after death, and he enjoys his benefit before death in the shape of his salary. This is the secret of the Boot-and-Show-Workers'-Union Tobin's hysterical efforts for "high dues and insurance"; this is the secret of the envious eyes with which many an A.F. of L. Union looks up at Gompers's Cigarmakers' Union, the pathfinder in that peculiar "system"; this is the secret of the strenuous efforts put forth, as recently described in these columns, by the officialdom of the Typographical Union to raise the mortuary fund, and their expectation, as stated in the *Typographical Journal* for last February, to kill "secession," provided the mortuary benefit was adopted;—and this is the secret of the move, now growing so popular, on the part of many capitalist establishments to set up and enforce an insurance fund among their employes.

No Union ever is originally formed for coffin and ambulance purposes. However in the dark the workers may be on their class interests and the real mission of Unionism, when they organize a Union the act is responsive to the latent pulsations of the Class Struggle: the act spells w-a-r, it spells aggression, it is a move forward, and progressward. The present psychology of the A.F. of L. Unions is not the psychology of the "middle class"; it is not even the psychology of their birth; the present psychology of the A.F. of L. has receded back even of that. The present psychology of A.F. of L. Unionism is the psychology of rout—the psychology that causes men to cling to ambulance wagons and coffins. It is not Conservatism: it is Retrogression at full trot.

The article "The Truth About A.F. of L. Conservatism" is a darkener of counsel.

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