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EDITORIAL

“THE MASSES.”

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THE above is the name of a new publication; it is issued in this city; as the bulk of its leading contents indicates, its specialty is Co-operatives, that is, co-operative enterprises; and it explains its appearance with the words: “The Socialist movement is a growing movement and naturally creates a growing literature.” What kind of literature, among other, a growing movement begets *The Masses* illustrates in its very initial issue with an article by P. Vlag which article, intended to answer the question why Socialists should join co-operatives, opens with this sentence:

“Because the Socialist movement in the United States is very much in need of an economic basis.”

No sentence, even if gotten up to order upon the order of the Socialist Movement to expose the co-operative scheme, can be conceived that will more neatly illustrate the phantasmagoric state of co-operative mentality.

“Economic basis,” “economic foundation,” “economic groundwork”—these are terms that have acquired a well defined meaning in Socialist parlance. They have become technical terms. By them is understood the prevalent system of production, distribution and exchange in a given society or nation. The “economic basis” of a movement is the prevalent system of production, distribution and exchange in the society in which such a movement arises.

The “economic basis” of feudalism was a system of production, exchange and distribution pivoted upon Land. When, in the course of social evolution, that “economic basis” was so far undermined that the social system planted upon it could no longer stand, feudal society fell, overthrown by a movement that had for its “economic basis” a system of production, exchange and distribution pivoted upon the

instruments, privately owned, wherewith to operate the Land. The new social system was the capitalist. The development of the capitalist social system simultaneously undermined its own "economic basis." Originally individualistic, owing to the smallness of the tool of production, production became co-operative, owing to the mammoth caliber of the tool. In equal measure with this evolution the "economic basis" of capitalism shrank, and a new "economic basis" rose furnishing the basis for a new movement—the Socialist. In no country more so than, or even as much so as, the United States has this development taken place. All the leading branches—productive, distributive and of exchange—are cast in the co-operative mold; and what is more, all these combined are so interdependent that, without their mutual co-operation, society would now be paralyzed. Accordingly, in no country is the "economic basis" broader and deeper than here for a Socialist Movement.

Mr. Vlag's statement implies a denial of this reasoning and conclusion. According to him the "economic basis" for a Socialist Movement is still wanting in America. According to him the co-operatives are to supply the deficiency. How? From whichever side the co-operative's answer is looked at it is a chimera.

The "economic basis" for a national movement must be something of national proportions. Does the co-operative propose to duplicate the present capitalist co-operatives? That is a wild chimera.

Or does the co-operative propose to furnish the "economic basis" by means of institutions that will lighten the strain of high prices through cheaper sales, and relieve the evils of low wages through little dividends? Every rational Socialist will acclaim anything that renders the struggle for existence less intense. But all such Socialists know that the co-operative's relief can be enjoyed only so long as only a few profit by it: the instant the relief becomes general wages would take a proportional tumble. An "economic basis" for the few only; in other words, an "economic basis" that is not nationally basic is a puerile chimera.

The growing rose-stock naturally creates a growing number of thorns. If these outgrow the rose they choke it. The rose's chance lies in its outstripping the thorns. No doubt the growth of the Socialist Movement naturally creates a growing literature. That much of that literature partakes of the nature of thorns is

illustrated by *The Masses*. If these thorns outgrow the Rose of the Social Revolution they will certainly choke it to death with their commercial and private interest clutches. The chance of the Rose of the Social Revolution lies in its outstripping the thorns.

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