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EDITORIAL

INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM.

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COMMENTING upon the late convention of the Industrial Workers of the World, “Chagrin,” the correspondent whom the metal workers of Germany felicitously charged with the mission of proceeding to our shores, and study and report the American Labor Movement, writes in the Stuttgart, Ger., *Metallarbeiter Zeitung* of last July 17th as follows:

“The debate turned upon the Preamble, or, more accurately, upon the following passage in the same: ‘Between the working class and the employing class a struggle must go on UNTIL ALL THE TOILERS COME TOGETHER ON THE POLITICAL, AS WELL AS ON THE INDUSTRIAL FIELD.’ Against this passage, the underscored portion thereof, the ‘revolutionary’ oratorical cannonade was directed. The bone of contention was removed in the identically radical manner that a certain theatrical manager kept the bad air out of his building. As the well known story runs, he said to the architect: ‘On all sides there are complaints about the ventilation; just leave the thing out, so that I may have peace.’ The passage, that was objectionable to the ‘revolutionary’ ears, was simply dropped out of the Preamble, and, in lieu of its former positive utterances, now are found merely feuilleton-like verbiages.”

A terser and more accurately pictorial representation of that allegedly I.W.W. convention it would be difficult to give. It snaps off the “revolutionists” to perfection. So perfect is the snapshot that photographer “Chagrin” may be forgiven for the error he falls in of heading his article on the I.W.W. with the title “Syndicalism in America.” In the hurly-burly of events in America, a visitor may well be forgiven for judging the I.W.W. by the crew that gathered at the last I.W.W. convention, and the pranks they there indulged in—their “revolutionary” rhodomontades; their glorification of individual theft as expropriation by installments; their outbursts of ruffianly, and, of course, cowardly brutality; their “I’m a Bum” lyrics; in short, their noisy capers of Indians who have found a watch.

When the said I.W.W. convention met, the I.W.W. had ceased to exist—at least, there were only fragments left of the organization that was set on foot in June, 1905. That organization was not “syndicalist,” as the term is generally understood in Europe. Indeed, the very passage quoted from “Chagrin’s” article is at fisticuffs with the theory that the I.W.W. and Syndicalism are the same thing.

What “Syndicalism” is was treated extensively in these columns, last week, in the article under that title. Whether or not it be correct to denounce the thing sweepingly in Europe, one thing is certain—in America it has no standing ground. As stated in last week’s article, whosoever struts in America in the phraseology of “Syndicalism” is as ridiculously out of place as a monkey would be in the frozen North, or a Polar bear in the wilds of the torrid zone. Here in America such creatures are freak-frauds.

Industrial Unionism is the product of American development, economic and social.

American economic development has proved the craft Union system of organization the surest means to dislocate the working class. Next to the labor-dislocating vanities, born of nativistic superstitions, the vanities born of the material interests that craft Unionism generates, are the most effective in keeping the proletariat rent asunder. Whether the thing called the “General Strike” be or be not rational, certain it is that the conduct of an economic body of one craft in continuing at work in a shop, railroad or yard, where another body is on strike, and, by so doing, killing the strike, is a conduct unworthy of proletarian ethics, and delightful only to the employer. Such is the case with craft Unionism. Its craft method of autonomous organization prevents any other conduct: its craft method of organization even bars the entrance of any principle that looks to the solidarity of the proletariat. Such being the situation, and American capitalism pointing the way with its mammoth system of co-ordination of industries, Industrial Unionism made here its appearance.

Industrial Unionism is banked upon the principle that, for the same reason that loyalty is demanded of every individual member towards all others in any craft organization, loyalty is likewise demanded of every individual craft towards all others in the industrial world. As a matter of course, from such a position inevitably flowed a recognition of the necessity of a correct political posture for the very existence of the organization. It follows that, perceiving the working class ruptured

into craft bodies on the industrial and, consequently, ruptured into as many political fractions on the political field, the I.W.W. was launched with a preamble in which the call rang clear and distinct to the proletariat to “come together on the political, as well as on the industrial field.”

“Industrial Unionism,” accordingly, presents a marked contrast with “Syndicalism.” With the latter, the FUNCTION of the organization—the physical force overthrow of capitalism—is accentuated; with the former, the thing accentuated is the STRUCTURE of the body. With the latter—due to the circumstance that the popular military education of France prepares there the ground for organized armed insurrection—the STRUCTURE of the economic organization receives little attention; with the former—due to the combined circumstances that the absence of popular military education in America does not here prepare the ground for armed insurrection, and that capitalism has here furnished us with a powerful substitute for physical force by shaping the mold of the industrially organized and integrally constructed battalions of useful labor—the ultimate FUNCTION of the economic organization flows so naturally from its STRUCTURE that it requires little thought. While attending intelligently to its immediate and economic needs, the revolutionary function of the Industrial Union falls within the province of its political expression to agitate and educate for.

Such was the I.W.W. For reasons too numerous to repeat, the organization, at least in national proportions, has been ground to dust. The creative principle, however, which is {it?} set up, and which its literature formulated, is undying. Today, as “Chagrin’s” article attests, the monkeyshines of the handful of freak-frauds, who masquerade in the name of the I.W.W. and rant “Syndicalism,” may cast a cloud upon the fair name of Industrial Unionism. The thing itself is bound to revive in more powerfully organized form.

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