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EDITORIAL

Roosevelt's Lunches.

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That is happening just now on the stage of New York State politics that throws a side-light upon the conditions that confront the bona fide movement of labor in English speaking countries in general, the United States in particular.

It is no uncommon argument on the lips of the adversaries of the Socialist movement that Socialism may fit the Continental mind, meaning the mind of the peoples of continental Europe, but that it does not fit the English mind, meaning America along with England and Australia. The upholders of this theory, consciously and unconsciously, seek to mystify their point and exalt it by vague hints at the superiority of the "Anglo-Saxon" race, its aversion to "domination," its love of "individuality" and more such terms that, though unintelligible even to the users of them, are intended to give a color of scientific basis to the assertion. Of course, as put, and for the purposes put, the statement is hollow. And yet, at bottom, there is a profound underlying truth that may not be overlooked if an intelligent estimate is to be made.

There IS a marked difference in the situation on the "Continent" and that of the "English world." The difference lies in the greater chicanery of the ruling class of the latter. Much as capitalism rules on the Continent, the feudal sense of honor still is felt there. On the other hand, much as feudal forms seem to prevail in England, capitalism, with its utter impurity, has the whip hand. On the Continent, the ruling class disdains to "bargain" with its "inferiors," not even for the sake of obtaining political safety does it condescend to associate with them. In England, in the "English world," in general, it is just the reverse. The result of all that is that, in the first place, class distinctions are kept up so clearly in the Continent that the straight course of the proletariat is greatly aided thereby, whereas the opposite policy elsewhere blurs and confuses the class lines to the detriment of the labor movement; and, in the second place, the absence of political "bargains" on the Continent keeps the vision of the workers clear, while the opposite tactics elsewhere, by seeming to make concessions that amount to nothing, deceive the public mind, and retard a healthy growth. A striking illustration of this is at hand.

Theodore Roosevelt is elected Governor of New York. Roosevelt is not an upstart; he comes from an old landed family. The cheating of capitalism, one would say, is not among the sap that nourished him. And yet what do we see? No sooner is he elected, than he, the aristocrat, picks out, and starts in to lunch with, three or four of the most disreputable labor fakirs that New York City fakirdom has produced. Does Roosevelt love such company? Surely not, he feels sick at stomach in their company. But he needs such company. The publication of the seeming terms of equality upon which Roosevelt and these fakirs meet has a far-reaching effect: in the minds of large masses of the workers, the delusion that no class distinction separates them from the employing class receives fresh nourishment. But above all, by bestowing a little attention to such traitors to the working class, possibly giving them a job or so, he succeeds in giving them a prestige, that adds power to them in the ranks of the workers, and by so much hampers and impedes the march of education and progress.

Capitalism, together with all the chicanery that the word implies, permeates the English speaking world; hence the problem before the Socialist is there most difficult, hence the course of the labor movement is there hardest.

But though hardest, in that sense, it is easiest in others. Other features of the English speaking world are infinitely more aidful to the accomplishment there of the Social Revolution. These features are, however, not available at the start, they are available only at the later stage of the movement. Hence we may, we must, be prepared to see the movement in the English speaking world, for a time, lag far behind that on the Continent until the first stages are past; beyond those stages, the advantages we enjoy will add wings to our movement, in America especially, and we shall outstrip our comrades elsewhere, who, differently from now, when we are struggling with difficulties they know not of, will then be struggling with difficulties we shall not know of.

In the meantime, and just now, hard are the knots the movement here has to saw through. The nature of these knots Roosevelt lunches bring into relief.

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